VOYAGE OF THE JESTERS

15p
Constantinople
Salonika
Imbros
Plains of Troy
Hellespont
Lemnos
AEGEAN SEA
1915
1916
1915
1917
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1917
Alexandria
Pelusium
El Arish
PALESTINE
1916
Bir el Abd
Romani
Kantara
1917
SUEZ CANAL
1916
SINAI
R. NILE
E.R.

By the Same Author

NOVELS:

TELL ENGLAND
ROSSENAL
DAMASCUS GATE
WANDERLIGHT
DAPHNE BRUNO
THE FULFILMENT OF DAPHNE BRUNO
MORRIS IN THE DANCE
THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED
A FAMILY THAT WAS
MARY LEITH

ESSAYS:

THROUGH LITERATURE TO LIFE
THE SHOUT OF THE KING

DRAMA:

THE BERG

THE JESTING ARMY

BY

ERNEST RAYMOND

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PART I

THE JESTING ARMY

CHAPTER I

A SHIP OUT OF THE NORTH-WEST

THIS was a complete circle of the sea, empty and calm beneath an empty sky. The sun, just lifting above the horizon, had the world to itself: a very peaceful world with nothing human anywhere. The sun sailed upward along its arc, and nothing happened except the changing light and the movement of the colours on the floor of the sea. Purples and mauves passed away under the sun's feet; turquoise, indigo and aquamarine lay about for a while and then slipped home, disappearing with all the modesty of colour. The sun climbed halfway to its noon height, burnishing the sky almost to whiteness; and the sea, too dazzled now to be anything but a mirror, lay there, one stable brilliance from sky to sky.

Such was the beauty of a day that came and died fifteen years ago; and now has none to remember its date with clearness or to mourn it specially, among the crowd of other days.

Soon on the north-west rim a thread of smoke appeared, lifting itself a little way towards the zenith, but perishing quickly in that peaceful sky; the light slaying it as fast as it trembled upward. And under the thread came gradually a little wraith of indeterminate shape forming itself in the ribbon of haze, which, but for this new visitant, would hardly have been perceived. The wraith was moving fast, for already it had the outline of a ship, and a great one too—three—four—funnels coming into view. Had there been a human watcher in that ring of sea he must have wondered at the rapid approach and enlargement of the vessel and at its perturbing

zigzag course. Why in a sea so calm and empty should a ship, with all its power working, steer south-east-by-east for a space, then south-east-by-south, and then south-east-by-east again?

When she was in the centre of the circle with all her decks visible, he might have wondered more. For four bells sounded; an alarum hooted from the funnel, though the sea had never been such a painted peace; and as the siren sustained its monotonous scream, thousands of soldiers in field-brown serge rushed to the decks, tying their life-belts as they came. At their muster stations by the boats that would save them, they paraded in their platoons or their drafts, standing three deep with their backs to the walls of the state-rooms and their faces to the sea. Their officers stood in single file along the deck rails, with their backs to safety and their faces to the men. And at points along the rails, where the boats, if lowered, would halt for their passengers, the sentries stood with their bayonets fixed.

And now a General Officer—O.C. Troops, no doubt—with a ship's officer beside him, passed along the ranks of men, reviewing them. After a quarter of an hour, the word went that he was satisfied: "Dismiss!" it echoed itself from end to end of the ship, which had been ploughing rapidly onward all the time. There was a break-up of the ordered ranks and of the silence. All became a confusion of movement and chatter, with laughter and grumbling leaping out of it. The chatter was mostly in the brogue of men who came from the middle parts of a North Sea island, but there was some from the men of its capital too, and some from the men of its western spits. The laughter belonged to all: and so did the grumbling.

The watcher on the sea might not have understood all this, but the men in the ship did. Yesterday morning their huge black-painted liner came out of her English Channel, accompanied by little low-lying warships with Jack Tars aboard, and God bless them for the comfort they were! But as soon as they had escorted her into the wide Atlantic—at eight bells precisely—they turned about and went home, with their white ensigns roaring above them—for which abandonment might God take back His blessing of them!—and thereafter the troopship steered her zigzag course, her look-out in the crow's-nest anxiously scanning the seas ahead, and a military officer on

the deck training his Zeiss glasses on the seas around. Both were looking for a little dark spot on the water which would be the single eye of the enemy; both half dreading to see this speck, since it promised death, and half hoping to see it, since it promised excitement; for both were young. Moreover the military officer had twenty armed soldiers in the ship's bows and twenty more in her stern, ready to fire on this sinister little eye and blind it. This was his Submarine Picket, and he would have liked to use it once; he would have liked to blaze away at a German periscope.

The congestion after the Dismiss quickly disentangled itself, and once more the officers were walking up and down the promenade decks in twos and threes, and the "Other Ranks" were reclining on the lower decks, and on the poop and on the foc'sle. They all seemed much the same in their khaki uniforms: just England's standardized machines for fighting; the officers a more expensive variety than the privates, who were put together cheaply enough, God knows. But one on that ship is to be singled out and spoken of: the officer who now walked along to a transverse rail for'ard, from which he could look down at the multitude of tommies reclining on the hatches and the deck-spaces below.

This was a young man of about twenty-seven years, who looked about twenty-one: his height was good; his skin was fair and clean; his hair—well, it should have been fair also, but it had been dulled by several years of public-school pomades; his eyes were bright—with that peculiar brightness which is as quick to heighten with humour as to lull with dreams; and his body was slender—for Antony O'Grogan, though Irish by parentage, had been born in England and trained in England, and he had the long, slim, graceful body which is the chief result (some say the only result worth mentioning) of an English public school.

Such was his external portrait, by England drawn. Inside him, probably, there was not a little of Ireland lingering; and why not: was it ever heard that the combative Irishry gave up their pastures easily, howsoever the possessive English might enclose them? Tony O'Grogan's father-in-law, the excellent General Daubeny, in the days when he wanted to prevent the young man from marrying his daughter, used to describe him as "a dreamy Irish boy wanting to write poetry," and when the General dropped into that phrase, he dropped

nearer the truth than was usual with him, good simple man; for "a dreamy Irish boy wanting to write poetry" tells a great deal about Antony O'Grogan.

He was dreaming now, as he gazed down at the recumbent soldiers. They, for the most part, were taking the air and the Biscayan sun in little more clothing than their khaki trousers and their "Army grey-back" shirts. A few sat or knelt about a game which seemed to require that its president called out at frequent intervals, "House!" On a donkey engine, with his trousers rolled above his naked knees and his sleeves above his elbows, a sun-burned youngster sat, thrumming a mandoline and quietly singing:

> "If you were the only girl in the world
> And I were the only boy
> Nothing else would matter in the world to-day. . . .

Occasionally a "funny man," without rising from his supine position, sent a jest upon the air: "Eh, lads, but are we there yet? Call me when tha can see them Dardanelles," and another answered him: "Nay, Joa, Ah reckon it'll be quite woon o'clock afore we're in;" at which there was laughter from those who were awake, encouraging a third humorist to outdo the others: "Do Ah care how long it takes us to get there? Do Ah? *Thoomp!* Ah never was a soldier, tha knows." But these voices were sporadic and intermittent; the only regular sounds were the voice of the man calling "House!" and the quiet humming of the mandoline-player, who had changed his tune to:

> "Who's your lady friend,
> Who's the little girlie by your side. . . ?"

He sang alone; only when he strummed up the irresistible chorus, "Here we are again," did a great number of the men join in:

> "Here we are, here we are, here we are again,
> Tom and Dick and Harry, and feeling as right as rain.
> Are we downhearted? *No!* Let 'em all come.
> Here we are, here we are, here we are again. . . ."

Half a hundred of them found themselves roaring this information across the empty, unheeding seas. Then fell the wide peace again; and the mandoline-player, who was a shy

fellow, suddenly perceived that someone on the deck-rail was watching him with humorous eyes; and, blushing crimson, he withdrew his shameful instrument behind the donkey engine, out of sight. And all the while the ship went on, carrying its cargo of souls to that peninsula of Gallipoli where, as it was said in August, 1915, the average life of a man was fourteen days.

Five minutes later the peace was shattered. The men were getting up, moving about, and reshaping themselves as ordered platoons and drafts: it was the parade for "Physical Jerks." And they stood there now, stripped to their vest and trousers, and obeying the raucous commands of their sergeants. The young officer watching them was much impressed: to say the truth, when these lads had swarmed up the gangways of the ship, overloaded with equipment and coats and kitbags and helmets, he had thought them a rather slovenly crowd, and quite unequal to the task of driving the Turks out of Gallipoli; but now as he saw them in their skin-tight vests, with the tint of health on their throats and forearms and their muscles rippling everywhere, he thought them an army of strapping fellows quite equal to most jobs in this present quarrelling world.

An acre of naked arms, swinging in unison through the sunlight, like a field played upon by a fitful wind; and all around the endless sea—it was a curious picture. A few were the gnarled limbs of veterans, but most were fresh, round arms, lately taken from boyish tasks; all were fair arms, the fruit of a northern country, and all were very clean arms, so odd are the ideals of that country. Some spoke of manual toil, and some of a softer life at office desks. A number of them were tattooed; and here again the watching officer read the sentimentality which, a few minutes ago, he had heard in their songs. On seven different arms he saw a pattern of two hearts pierced by a single arrow; on one the words "I love Annie Chambers" generously illuminated; and on another a mother's tombstone. One of the veteran's wrists kept the print of an older war in a portrait of Major-General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, when he was a young man and smiled from under his wide-brimmed hat.

"Stand at ease!"

All the arms sank out of sight.

"Dismiss!"

The men went back again to their peace: an English peace: the peace of lying under the sun on a troopship which was still a long way from the war, and of being good-humoured and irresponsible and grumblingly confident; the peace of a patient race.

Antony O'Grogan, though still on his rail, was not seeing them now. His homesickness was still about him, and it had driven him far back into the past. He thought of that Kensington vicarage, where he and Derek and Keatings and Peggy and Joyce had so worthily upheld the tradition that the children of an Anglican vicarage should be no better than the children of the layman next door—nay, rather worse. He thought of his years at school where he had been quite up to the average in games, and above the average in work; he thought of his years as a young master at Stratton Lye, where he had been as popular a companion of the boys as all lively young prep-school masters are, and a much more successful teacher than most. And above all, he thought and thought and thought of that hunger which had accompanied him throughout his life—that hunger to establish a perfect union with a fellow creature. To what a number of doors it had sent him knocking, in search of a perfect love: to young Wavers', old Raking's, Sybil Chandry's, Frank Doyly's, and then to the passionate capture of Honor and a really romantic elopement with her as his wife! Honor . . . Honor . . . how sure he had been that in his worship of her he had found the perfect thing he wanted, and—ah, well, what pain he had suffered when he discovered that even this fine fire could wear down and dim—not go out, oh no—he still loved her, but no longer with the love he had craved. To many such a commonplace discovery might have seemed a small enough affair, but to him it had been a disaster, the big hidden disaster of his youth.

Such had been the course of his years, and they had all led to what? To a troopship which was fast bearing him to a battle where the average life of a soldier was fourteen days. The Family was behind him: it was getting farther and farther behind him as the ship went on; perhaps Keatings and Joyce and Derek and Peggy were forever behind him, like yesterday's

sun that dropped astern. And Honor too. They had all been steps to this high sunny deck.

What had he done with his life? Nothing much, and perhaps he would be blotted out before he could justify the strange fact that he had been born; perhaps he had less than a month in which to crown it with something done. By God, he must crown it with something done! Something really big. He would!

We have surmised that there was still a good deal of Ireland in Tony O'Grogan, despite his English exterior. It is merely a fancy, but may be true. For a visionary youth, drawing his blood from that island of saints and rebels and sorrowful singing, would be quite likely to spend his callow years in the pursuit of impossible perfections—and to write poetry about them; and Tony had certainly done this; for twenty years he had sought an impossible love, and now, on his deck-rail, he was eager that his life should be a rounded artistic whole. Which in 1915 was rather absurd; even if it had been very sensible in any of humanity's years.

However, it was a fine resolve on which to suspend thinking; and he raised his face to examine the surrounding seas. They were as empty as always. Not once since the destroyers went home had the troopship lifted a sail above the horizon. *Ah ha*, that was what happened if you let slip the British navy from its leashes: it drove the enemy's shipping off the seas, and forced the neutrals (with their flags painted on their hulls) to follow its chosen channels. "A somewhat bossy proceeding," said Tony, who was one of the Intelligentsia and rightly detested jingoism: "a very bossy proceeding," said he—and thrilled with delight at it. For the honest truth is that "the unrepentant Britisher" against whom Tony had often thundered, lurked in him, as in every one of us, let him argue how he would.

But even as he grinned at the clean-swept seas the man in the look-out half way up the foremast tinkled his bell twice and fixed his glass on a far-away spot. Immediately a rumour blew along the deck, and Tony was soon but one of a large group of officers who were all training their field-glasses on the same spot. The spot had become two spots. And after a short time, so rapidly was the troopship travelling, the officers' glasses made out a government vessel towing a malicious little monitor to its duties off the Dardanelles. As they overtook

it, it seemed but a floating platform, with a long gun which had turned its nozzle towards the eastward battles, and a white ensign roaring in the wind behind. The trooper dropped a friendly signal, and a thousand soldiers waved their hands, to this little fellow-fighter.

The ship passed under the sun and left it behind to drop into the sea: it passed out of the noon heat into the coolness of evening. Six bells sounded, and a bugle rang the Officers' Mess call over the higher decks:

> "Officers' wives have pudding and pies,
> Sergeants' wives have skilly."

The soldiers hummed the words that filled the call, and made cynical but tolerant comments on the fine meal to which their officers were now strolling. For an hour the promenade decks were deserted, while the noise of jingling cutlery came out of the ports on to the seas, and the ship went on. Then little groups of officers, their inner machinery warmed and comfortably moving, began to reappear upon the decks. Tony emerged with a companion.

This companion was a subaltern whose acquaintance he had made the previous day. Hughes Anson was his name, but his familiars called him "The Roseate Hughes," or "Rosy," because at the top of his tall powerful body was a round face with cheeks rubicund from hearty living and fearless drinking. He was no part of the 378th Lancashire Brigade which filled most of the ship, but one of the many officers who were taking out drafts to the 162nd (Essex) Division, so Tony had not met him before. But he was fast developing an affection for Hughes Anson: there was such an intellectual ruthlessness, and his talk gave you such delightful shocks. To Tony who had been bred in the conventional idealism of an Anglican vicarage, Hughes Anson's talk was easily the most shocking and delightful entertainment that he had known. Not before had he met a man who suffered his thoughts to arrive at such a merciless realism, or had such courage to utter them. But there was more in his attraction than this: Tony himself was clear-brained enough to see that such a

hearty and thorough-going intellectual ruthlessness, even if it inevitably issued in unmorality, was a form of integrity; and in some ways a more admirable thing than the foggy idealism which had been the atmosphere of his own youth. It was typical of this ruthlessness that he was the only officer on the ship with his hair shaved down to his skull in what was known as the "Dartmoor Crop": he had come from the French trenches; no cattle in his hair for him! And also that, in the days before this amusing war, he should have thrown up the profession of a solicitor with its meagre profits, for the wholly unmoral but wholly fascinating game of Advertising, where, said he, you exploited to the utmost, and in the most diverting way, every cupidity and weakness of the mob, and were properly paid for doing it.

In Tony's afterthoughts Hughes was to be something of a symbolical figure. He saw then that, although the man's intellectual ruthlessness was sincere enough, it served also as a cover for his emotional loyalty to England, and so he was, after all, just the usual Englishman talking cynicism and sedition in preference to idealism and patriotism; but in his case the cynicism was clearly thought out and honestly held, while the emotional sentimentalism was faced, weighed, accepted and hidden out of sight; the two qualities lying in two distinct strata, with the cynical uppermost and visible. He was, as it were, the usual Englishman become self-understanding—which, by the way, is almost a contradiction in terms, since the usual Englishman has got these two qualities into such a glorious jumble that he can make neither head nor tail of them—excepting always this: that, on nine occasions out of ten, the cynicism alone should be vocal.

"And now let's drink," said Hughes, after two strolls round the deck. "It's my birthday to-day. Yes, it's my birthday."

"Not really?" asked Tony.

"Yes. I'm sure it is. I haven't had a birthday for seven or eight months. Come and celebrate." He broke into the Smoking-room, where there were many officers. "I will gather a few stout fellows and get drunk. What are birthdays for? . . . Joey, are you coming to my birthday party? You needn't if you don't want to; there's no compulsion. Graham, you sot, you'll come, I know . . . and Doc—come on, Doc; we shall probably need your treatment soon. . . . Mac, damn you, come here. . . ."

Thus The Roseate Hughes, who was as generous with his money as he was with his shocks, collected a worthy company around him; a dozen of them—twelve apostles—and stout men all. He was resolved that they should sit down thirteen at a table and defy the Luck of Gallipoli. "Whisky is the stuff to get tight on; we'll do it quickest on whisky." And when the glasses were brought, and the steward had been treated in honour of Lieutenant Hughes Anson's nativity, the young officers lifted their glasses to toast him: "Many happy returns, Rosy!"

"Don't mention it," he demurred. "I shall certainly have my next birthday before the voyage is over. Better cram in as many birthdays as possible, in case——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh well, cut that out," said the youngster, Graham.

"But why? Why blink one's eyes at it? . . . And what I want to know is: what on earth did I join the army for, and risk my life? . . . Can you tell me, Joey? I must have had some good selfish reason, but for the moment I have lost sight of it."

"For the sake of Brave Little Belgium," said the subaltern addressed as Joey.

"Don't you believe it. Not for Belgium. *Nor* for England's honour and the glory of the sea."

"You wanted to swank about with a sword," Tony proposed, over a match and a cigarette.

"God, no. I'm not such a fool as that. I don't think a sword's a fine thing: it's really rather a disgusting knife. But it's a jolly one. . . . Ah, that's it, Doc! I remember now, I thought to myself when they talked all their hot air about 'Who lives if England die,' I thought: 'Hughes, my boy, here's fun going. Here's a chance of fighting Germans and Turks, both of whom seem quite good fellows—which is a pity—but there you are: fighting's fun, and one may not be offered another such opportunity. Better take it. It isn't often one's offered the chance of killing as many people as possible, and being praised for it instead of being hanged.' Have some more whisky. . . . So we all rushed in, and I've not decided yet whether we made bloody fools of ourselves or not."

"Of course we did," said Graham, with brisk cheerfulness; and Tony knew that he said it, not out of a clear intellect like

Hughes Anson's, but because it was the fashion to talk like that.

"Well, I don't know." The Roseate Hughes shook his head doubtfully. "So far, to tell the honest truth, the war hasn't disappointed me; it's been pretty unsavoury sometimes, but on the whole I've enjoyed it. Yes, it's a good war; and I shall go on enjoying it to the end; wherefore Steward! Steward! bring some more whisky. . . ."

Now the Doctor spoke. He was an older man than any of the others, and quieter; the only man who had been long enough in his profession for it to stamp its peculiar lines upon his face and give its peculiar tones to his voice.

"I don't agree with you, that our motives for joining the army were purely selfish. They were mixed, no doubt, but there was something of decency about them."

"Oh, no," Graham demurred. "Oh, no! Surely not."

"Shut up, Graham," commanded Hughes. "How do you mean, Doc?"

"Well, in my own case," said the Doctor diffidently. "I weighed it up, and I was satisfied that, all things considered, the Allies' cause was a bit better than the Germans'——"

"Oh, granted, granted," Hughes Anson allowed. "But would it have made any difference to you if you had decided the opposite? It wouldn't have to me. I'm not fighting for the Allies because they're in the right, but because I enjoy it. It's fun to have a side and to play like hell for it. My point is that we ought to be too old now to think that there's something noble about killing a German because you happen to be an Englishman. I'm quite clear that war's a crime, but also that, like all other crimes, it's colossal sport. But when it comes to hanging up my sword on my study wall, after the war, and being hugely proud of it—well, I'm not going to be such a humbug as that. . . . All you louts are going to hang up your swords, aren't you, and tell your children about St. Crispin Crispin's Day."

"Why not," laughed Tony, whose intelligence was the quickest to see a flaw in the argument. "It may be humbug, but it'll be fun."

"Ah! Ah, ha!" exclaimed Hughes Anson. "O'Grogan thinks he has caught me out. But he hasn't. And the reason is that I happen to be one who doesn't enjoy humbug—not because I'm noble, but because the truth is generally so much

more amusing. So shall I tell you what I am going to do with my sword, O'Grogan?"

"Please do," Tony invited.

"I'm going to have a ring fixed to its point, and I am going to attach that ring to a chain that dangles from a certain little cistern in a certain little retired room in my house; and I shall be able to pull the handle of my sword every morning after breakfast."

This greatly pleased the others, who roared with laughter and vowed to do likewise.

More and more drinks came on the steward's tray, and at last Hughes Anson announced that he had got up a glow worthy of a birthday, so now the whole family party must go out into the garden to do physical jerks. Most willingly they marched after him, in single file and stamping rhythmically, Tony No. 2 in the file—out on to the deck, where no glimmer of light was allowed lest a German eye should be sweeping the ocean. They performed—well, who could say what they were performing in that unrelieved darkness? One heard the voice of The Roseate Hughes yelling every command he could remember: "Knees up! . . . Get 'em up, that fellah! . . . On the toes, rise. . . . *Wait* for it now—*wait* for it! . . . Knees, bend! . . . Stretch! . . . *Put that light out!* . . . Bend-er. . . . Stretch-er. . . . Bend-er. . . . (Stop that guffawing!) Arms *h'upp!*" Then it would seem he was manœuvring them as a platoon and getting them hopelessly entangled, for Tony was bumped into and cursed by half a dozen, and he bumped and cursed them back, while the Instructor roared: "Damn it! As you were, men. Damn it! As you were." God help us, but marching was simpler than this. "Form two deep. Form fours! Right! March at ease. Lift 'em up now! . . . Lift 'em up!" And they were stamping round the deck, and breaking into a song, which was sternly suppressed by the voice of their sergeant. A few seconds later, however, the milk of human kindness stirred in him and he commanded: "Sing, damn you, sing!" And on went the rhythmic column, bellowing, "It's a long way to Tipperary," not for love of the song, but in high ridicule of it, because it was the song the newspapers had foisted on to them. Three times round the deck their Instructor marched them, and then straight into the Smoking-room again, where he halted his parade in front of a table and shouted: "Stand at ease! Stand easy! Sit, you devils; sit and drink."

It may have been after the third drink, or after the fourth that The Roseate Hughes decided that he was hungry and needed eggs and bacon. And at once all resolved to go down into the bowels of the ship and disinter the cooks and demand eggs and bacon. In a riotous cataract they flowed down the stairways, and along the narrow alleyways, and into a clutter of stewards who, it appeared, were laying the breakfast tables before turning in to sleep. As the spokesman of his party, Hughes explained in a rather thick voice what was the matter. "Egg-sher-bacon," he said. "Egg-sher-bacon f'r fifteen." The stewards protested that it would be quite impossible to produce eggs and bacon at this hour. And The Roseate Hughes demanded of his deputation if they would be content with anything less, and they shouted "*No!*" as men shout who are asked if they will suffer their liberties to be taken from them. So their leader could do nothing but turn again to the stewards and ask: "J'hear that? These are fierce men—stou' fellers. Can't answer f' what they'll do if they're thwarted; no, nottifer thwarted. Nottifer thwarted." It was a good phrase, and worth repeating. "Nottifer thwarted." The Saloon Steward appeared, and, being a good, smiling, tolerant fellow, offered them anything in a cold line: some ham sandwiches or a slice of tongue or some galantine of turkey: but no, they were men to whom compromise was a dishonour, and Hughes Anson explained that it was his birthday. They began a rhythmic monotone, "We-want-eggsher-bacon. We-want-eggsher-bacon. We want eggsher-bacon . . ." and heads came out of cabin doors, and half-dressed, curious stewards hurried up to learn the nature of the disturbance; and soon the Master-at-Arms appeared, looking extraordinarily like a fireman in fatigue dress. When Hughes Anson saw this functionary in front of him, he stared at him with gaping admiration, then seized the cap off his head, clapped it on his own, and, thus dressed in a brief authority, went knocking on door after door along the alleyway, and calling: "Open up, in the name of the Lord!"

But just then a rumour flitted like a moth against his incandescent brain that someone had gone to fetch the O.C. Troops, or the Adjutant, or some other fount of discipline, and, on being told this, he inquired abruptly, "Wosshay? Wosshay?" The tale was repeated. "Why, then Dismiss!" he roared, with his admirable logic. And

they all scattered into various parts of the ship, and were seen no more.

But Tony was not with them, then. He had taken a drink to cool himself after the physical jerks; had laid down his glass rather stealthily, and slipped away to the dark deserted deck. Homesickness had ousted high spirits again; a seed from Hughes Anson's talk was germinating discomfort in his mind. This was Rosy's denial that, in the last analysis, there was anything but selfishness in fighting for England. Somehow it made him want to get away into solitude, there to think about his wife, and about those first days of the war, when he had glimpsed something of beauty in escaping from petty personal disappointments into the service of a cause that was larger than himself. So to his favourite stance for'ard on the promenade deck, where he could look down upon the men lying on the hatches below.

For the men, having nothing but the hot and headachy places of the ship for their dwelling, were spread as usual beneath the stars. The mandoline-player, under the soft influences of the night, was playing hymns: "Abide with Me," and "Sun of my Soul"; and in these still seas he might have been a gondolier playing his guitar on the waters of the Grand Canal. From a Music-room somewhere behind Tony came the noise of a group of officers singing in ribald chorus round a strummed piano: "There's the call of the pibrochs! The marching of men!" How they gloried in ridiculing "the call of the pibrochs!" And then with a pathetic vibrato they trilled: "The echoes are waking on forest and scar; 'Tis Angus my own . . . Angus my own . . . Coming home from the *wah!* . . ."

Honor. Honor whom he loved, but not as he had wished to love. Honor who had crowned his conviction that not for him in this life would there be a perfect union. And here he was only two days' journey from her, and missing her. Only two days, and he had not felt such a love for her, and such a need of her, since the days of his elopement. This was good; there was a spring of happiness in the heart of his homesickness. No other woman seemed so desirable to-night. Honor was his own, his woman's body granted to him . . . and at the

thought of her fresh young beauty his own body stirred. This was wonderful; the return of the old love so quickly.

The jokes they had enjoyed together! His last word had been a joke, tossed into her eyes drowning with tears, as the train moved out of the station: "Good-bye, darling. I'll send you a picture postcard of Constantinople." By that he had meant that the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, of which he was now a member, would drive the Turks out of Gallipoli by Christmas and enter Constantinople in triumph. And, by the Lord! as he had vowed this morning, he would play if he could an echoing part in that triumph.

Ah, but fighting? Wait: he had to think this out, too. Was Hughes Anson right in denying that it could ever be anything but an ignoble, though delightful, pastime? Let him try to recapture that vision he had seen when he believed it to be something good.

Why should it be good to fight in this hour for England? Always in his moments of best thinking he had been able to imagine a love—and to feel the seeds of it in himself—which could never be content unless it spread towards every living soul; which could not bear that one soul should be outside its embrace. And here he was, thinking it good to be fighting one half of the world! His heart, for a beat, paused in disappointment. This love-of-the-world idea, if he allowed himself to think it, would unnerve his fighting arm. No, he must see good in what he was doing now. He had seen it once, and must see it again.

Furrowing his brow, he thought hard, and he came through to a view which he told himself he could hold, honestly and without delusion. The war was here: there was no dodging it. It must go on to its end, and one or other side must win. And for him it was the idea "England" as against the idea "Germany." And yes, of those two, he truly and honestly—reason directing him, not emotion—chose England. Somehow or other (so ran his argument) he believed in her as an idea; and therefore he must help that idea to victory, or go down with it in defeat. What that idea was he did not yet see clearly; he felt it, rather than saw it, but it cried out to him for his support.

It was something to do with these good fellows who lay about on the deck all day, and under the stars at night; it was something to do with those guests at the birthday party,

all disclaiming nobility; and with this group of officers who were making such ribaldry out of the songs of war: he could shape it but vaguely now, but no doubt he would shape it better as the war went on.

Smoking and thinking, he dawdled there; till the ship became empty of sound, though lapped about by the sigh of her own movement through the water. "Well, well," thought he; "time to go to bed;" and he swung round, much happier now, and walked to his berth. And soon all the five thousand souls in that ship, except for the few watchers, were within her walls and asleep, while she, without a light showing anywhere, forged onward through the night seas, a high, dark shadow and a sound.

CHAPTER II

THE SHIP GOES ON

THE ship awoke in the Mediterranean. Tony, unable to sleep in the thickening heat of his cabin, had dragged a mattress on to the deck and dropped asleep beneath the maternal caress of a slight head-wind; and now he was awakened by no less majestic a valet than the sun, which had climbed up its stairs and was gazing into his eyes. He blinked at it: yes, there it was, right ahead of the ship's bows; then the ship must be steering due east. Sitting up, he saw on the starboard quarter, a long, grey, well-defined shadow. Africa. He jumped to his feet. Happiness and well-being were strangely aglow in his body, for his last thoughts the previous night had been happy. And here was a new happiness, to find the Mediterranean all about him. As he jog-trotted round the decks, he passed the pyjama'd legs of a hundred or more officers who had parked their mattresses side by side under the state-room windows. They, too, must have come up yawning from their cabins in the visiting heat last night, and bringing their beds with them. Round and round he trotted: and the third time he arrived on the starboard side, he ran into the rout of these officers, who were being swept indoors, sleepy and indignant, by the sailors swabbing the decks—three hardened men with brooms and bucket and hose.

And all the day was full of entertainment. The Mediterranean being a different theatre from the Atlantic, the programme was changed. Ships passed them now, and one and all flew the red ensign of the British Merchant Service, till the officers declared they were sick of this flag, and would have welcomed the colours of another nation. So high-handed the Navy had been! Hospital ships passed them,

homeward bound from Gallipoli: each a lovely vessel in dazzling white, with the red cross of mercy at three points along her hull, and a narrow ribbon of green all round. And the trooper herself, on this sun-baked morning, had changed: her cargo of men was no longer in the sombre hues of the North, but in the gay wear of the tropics. When the soldiers paraded for inspection, lo! they were all in light drill uniforms and sand-coloured Wolseley helmets; and the string of officers passing along their ranks to review them was a piebald snake: first the Chief in white drill from head to foot, then the O.C. Troops in a yellow silk shirt with collar undone and sleeves rolled up, then the Adjutant in a puggree tunic (was he not an old Indian army officer?), and lastly The Roseate Hughes himself, looking very big in his yellow shorts and shirt with his cherry face atop.

What this hearty person was doing at the tail-end of an official procession one did not quite know, but he winked up flippantly at Lieutenant O'Grogan, who was leaning over his rail to watch the scene. Perhaps he was orderly officer; perhaps he was making atonement for the night before.

At eleven o'clock in the Sergeants' Mess Tony was inoculated against typhoid; and as he was almost at once incapacitated in the left arm and shoulder, he regarded this savage proceeding as his first wound of the war. They told him, the brutes, that they had infused an army of about 3,000,000 germs into him; and he prayed that this host, which was not inconsiderable, had been enlisted for the duration of the war and would need no reinforcements. So unpleasant did the pain become that Tony, being quick, like every healthy male, to fear a serious issue to his disorders—even a fatal issue—wondered how he could get a doctor's opinion without appearing to seek it. His thought fell upon that quiet, middle-aged, likeable fellow, Lieutenant Wilmington, who had been one of Hughes Anson's guests last night; and finding him in a chair reading "Ordeal by Battle," he suggested a walk round the decks in pursuit of an appetite for lunch; and very gradually on that walk he hinted at his present remarkable suffering, and learned from Wilmington that it was all quite correct, and that he would probably feel much worse by the evening.

Now, next to a conversation in the dark between two men sharing the same bedchamber, there is no talk more certain to arrive at intimacy and confidences than the talk which

accompanies two men on their walk round a deck. Wilmington was soon telling the story of his own life, and telling it with manifest humility and sincerity, to abolish Hughes Anson's contention that men's ultimate motives were selfish. He spoke of his labour in building up a Harley Street practice, and of his success in the end. He said that his income for some years past had kept in the vicinity of £8,000 a year, and he hinted that it had been no easy thing to throw it up and take instead the two "pips" of an R.A.M.C. Lieutenant, with the screw which attached to them of about £400 a year. Especially as the practice, if deserted by him, could hardly be built up again, because it was almost wholly a personal matter. Frankly, old man, he had held back from what seemed his duty for eleven months because his wife had expensive tastes and his two boys were at an expensive school. But at last when he read of the appalling sickness at Gallipoli and heard the cry for more and more doctors, and especially for doctors of experience, and when he realized that his specialist knowledge was just what was wanted in these Middle East campaigns, he had scrapped everything and volunteered for Gallipoli. "I don't pretend to be anything more than a very ordinary person, with no bias whatever towards self-sacrifice—on the contrary, a very strong bias the other way—but I simply felt I had to do this, old man, and I did it. And, O'Grogan, isn't it funny how satisfied one feels after a move like that? It really *is* rather good to be badly needed somewhere and to be hurrying there without—er—without, as you might say, considering the cost."

Tony nodded profoundly: he suggested that, though Hughes Anson was marvellously clear-sighted over the range of his own experience, there were some experiences, old man, of which he knew nothing.

And so to lunch.

Twice the ship, which had slackened speed, passed under the sun and left it to sink, a golden ball, behind her stern; and then one early morning Wilmington and Tony were standing by her rails in a fever of admiration as she bore into Valetta, that city on the rocks and spurs of a Maltese bay. Devonport had been the last harbour-side town they had seen; grey-walled and slaty Devonport, half-veiled in the mists of morning; and now they were passing between the arms, outstretched, of a fairy place that rose in whiteness from a

shining sea. From terrace above terrace the white square buildings dreamed over the water, nor stayed their dreaming to heed the great visitor looming into port. White mansions, white churches, white bastioned forts, white lighthouses; and creeks between, where the long line of warships slept; and a panorama of dried and rock-strewn hills behind—great God! the whole array was no more real than its inverted reflection in the blue at its feet.

Though loth to leave such a sight, the two friends forced themselves down to breakfast, but during this meal there broke upon the air such a babble of tongues—all apparently saying the same thing, and saying it a hundred times—that they exchanged significant glances, asked each other what was breakfast compared with the need for understanding this uproar, and immediately hurried back to the deck.

So this was it! The ship had been moored to buoys, head and stern, and all along her black precipitous side the little bumboats were swarming, buzzing like insects round the carcass of an elephant. These bumboats, fore and aft, were shaped as gondolas, but amidships, instead of a cabin, they held a Maltese pedlar and his many-coloured wares: oranges, tomatoes, scarves, laces, cigarettes, and even little yellow birds in wooden cages. Each bumboat was a huckster's tray, but a tray which carried its owner instead of letting its owner carry it. And it was these owners, these brown, unshaven Maltese, who were all yelling in pidgin-English (except when they were abusing one another in their own language): "Cummon, sear; cummalong, sear. Buy orange. Cigaretta. Nice laces, captain. Verra good scarves, verra cheap, verra good for ze lady, she like it. Cummalong. Eengleesh good; Turk not good. Cummalong. German blood-awful-bugs. Cummalong, sear. Scarves. Cigaretta. Eengleesh, rich man; Maltese, poor man. Eengleesh verra kind, verra good, spend much money. Cummalong. Scarves. Cigaretta." And the tommies, crowding the rails, were coming along to some purpose, throwing their coins into the boats and drawing up their purchases in baskets, like Saint Paul in his basket on the wall of Damascus. They bought oranges, and tomatoes, and cigarettes, and so often (as Tony marked) the gaudiest of the scarves and the most vividly embroidered of the handkerchiefs for their women at home in the smoke-grey streets of Oldham, Manchester, and Ashton-under-Lyne.

Among the bumboats were smaller craft carrying little naked diving boys who screamed for patronage: strikingly handsome lads with eyes long-lashed and sparkling, and laughing teeth. How melancholy to think that such smooth and shapely youngsters must grow up into these dirty, unshaven, hokey-pokey ruffians of Maltese, sinning in their bumboats of oranges! but there it was: they must do so, and that was the trouble with humanity. Tony threw a sixpence to one of them, and he dived like a swordfish after it into the limpid water, and brought it up between his laughing teeth.

None too soon a notice was posted permitting some officers to go ashore. Hughes Anson, Tony and Wilmington all obtained leave, and went quickly on deck, in their pith helmets and lightest clothes, for if it was as hot as this on the water, what would it be like on the paved streets of the town? Tony and the doctor were for standing aside and allowing the senior officers to get into the ferries first, but not so The Roseate Hughes.

"Nothing in Orders about that," said he. "I don't think it even mentions a gangway in the Manual of Military Law—of which, let me tell you, I made a great study once upon a time, when I was up for a Court-Martial in France. Got whole sections of it off by heart, till I knew more about it than the President of the Court himself. I bewildered him and his pals so horribly with Section This and Subsection That, that they acquitted me. And as far as I can remember, I was guilty. So 'cummalong,' as we say in Malta."

And he slipped, one of the first, down the gangway; closely followed by Tony and the doctor.

"Which is a parable, a parable of what happens in life," he continued, stepping into the ferry. "The unmannerly realist goes ahead, and the conventionalists and idealists come shamefacedly after, and take up his position. It's always the same. Do you know, all my best friends are idealists like you two. Extraordinary how your type always likes me. I suppose I am a bit of a holiday for you." Thus he explained the position to them, standing in the ferry because he was too happy to sit down; and the ferry carried them across the water; and the great ship dwindled behind them, with its rows of patient faces.

As the boat touched the quay Hughes demanded of one of the scoundrels who had propelled it, "How much,

Romeo?" And when the man, grinning, said, "A shilling for each, sear," he gave him sixpence for each, and replied, "Oh yessio" to his "Oh no!" The fellow was still saying "A shilling for each, sear," as they stepped ashore—right into the chatter of an old brown-habited and bearded monk who besought of them "alms for the poor of all denominations." To this new friend Hughes gave a short lecture on the advisability of always producing some guarantee of good faith ("A shilling for each, sear," said a voice somewhere), and when he had concluded it, the old monk besought of him "alms for the poor of all denominations." Hughes found a sixpence for him and was in the act of presenting it when his eye fell on a demure-eyed girl with her head enhaloed in a monstrous one-sided hood of black—and he said, "My God!" and gaped.

They dragged him away from this enchantment ("A shilling for each, sear," came the voice) and put him in a quaint carriage resembling a horse-drawn bassinette more than anything else; and, jumping in themselves, bade the driver carry them into the heart of affairs. He drove them up streets thronged with people dressed in many colours, among whom the brown-habited monks ambled to their works of mercy and the black-hooded girls moved with their alluring grace—followed by Rosy's eyes, and by his exclamations: "The devil, O'Grogan! did-jever see anything like that? Damned jolly little bint, that one, too!" Everywhere there were British: army officers in yellow gaberdines, sailors in white drill, wounded soldiers in blue serge, nurses in grey alpaca with scarlet facings; all strolling about, supremely at ease, like the people in possession. The language of the streets accommodated itself to these strollers; the advertisements cried to them; the shop fronts displayed their whisky, their tea, their soap and their marmalade. And in a sunburnt field by a large hospital stood the goal-posts that they had needed last winter and would need again.

Coming to a wide road, whose footways were bordered, not so much by trees as by tall pink bouquets, the three friends climbed down from the bassinette, and gave the driver half as much as he asked, thereby giving him twice as much as he deserved. "Noh, noh," he protested, "it is two shillings for each, captains," but they walked off down the wide strada. Promptly the driver whipped up his meagre horse and followed

them, moaning: "Two shillings for each, captains." They went round a corner, and round he came too; they walked down a long narrow street, and he followed them; they visited a shop, and he halted outside; they crossed diagonally a wide square, and, one length behind them, came the bassinette crossing diagonally too, while its driver murmured, "Two shillings for each, captains. *Noh*, captains"—in heart-broken reproach—"two shillings for each." Hughes tried shouting, "*Oh allay au diabolo!*" but he answered only "Two shillings for each, captains." None of them was quite sure at what hour they lost him.

And he was succeeded by other touts. There was a lanky tout who walked at their side pestering them to have "lunshone, sear"; there was a ragged man with a six days' beard who padded at their backs offering to function as "guide, sear"; there was a little barefoot boy who somersaulted and cart-wheeled along the gutter for "one penny, sear"; and then, to their blaspheming dismay, there came another driver with his horse-drawn perambulator, and he accompanied them down the narrow streets and across the wide squares, inviting them to a drive.

Out of all this they were suddenly wafted, as on Aladdin's carpet, when they entered the spacious fane of the Junior Army and Navy Stores—which, by the way, seemed a wonderful thing to strike in the middle of the Great Sea, half-way between Europe and Africa. Its doors swung behind them, and it was as if they had exchanged the noisy chaffer of a Cairo bazaar for the murmuring solemnities of a London club. Here were quiet counter-hands with level voices and an easy courtesy; deferential but not fawning. Here were cricket bats and tennis rackets and riding boots; rubber baths, sponges and soap; oatmeal and marmalade; and, moreover, a dignified silence and not a trace of worry or panic about the war. They cashed your cheques on Cox's here, and trusted you. Singularly restful, this atmosphere of straight dealing, sound wares, and ample profit!

Back to the ship after tea, and he spent the rest of the evening watching the coal-heavers on their barges shovelling the coal into the basket lowered by the ship's derrick. These Maltese coolies were blackened with coal-dust into niggers of pink lips and gleaming teeth; and there was no moment when some of them were not squabbling with others at the tops of their

voices, and gesticulating wildly. Sometimes they seized lumps of coal and made as if to hurl them at their contradictors, and sometimes they shoved their shirts into their trousers with threatening deliberation, so as to be untrammelled for the fight. But the squabbles never reached a head. The cheering, delighted tommies roared every encouragement down from the deck, in the hope of forcing an issue: "That's right, matey, don't you take no backchat from *'im!* . . ." "Eh, yon fellow's no better ner thou art, tha knows. Give it 'im!—who's he to talk, any road? . . ." "Let 'im 'ave it, Sambo. Gie 'im a slop rahn'd the kisser! . . ." "Yah —*you* bash 'is face in—that'll learn 'im! Land 'im one with the bloody shovel!" But no; just as you expected to see a murder, the combatants would pick up their shovels again and resume their filling of the basket.

They finished in the half-light, and drifted away on their barges. They had done a part towards driving death nearer to the Turks. Darkness drained the yellow hills of colour, and extinguished them; and the insubstantial city changed into ten thousand points of light, above the water and under it. Presently a bell tinkled on the bridge of the ship, and she went out of Valetta under cover of the dark.

Dared one admit that the Mediterranean was becoming monotonous? Day after day the heavens declared the glory of God, and the firmament showed His handiwork; and it palled. So much so that, on the second day out from Malta, Hughes sought relief in a long talk with Tony on Sex.

"Come and I'll tell you all about it," he said.

And with his accustomed frankness, Tony sitting beside him in a deck chair, he gave an outline of his sexual life; and the Mediterranean went by unheeded; for environment is apt to go out, like the garden view from the windows, when men light up their heads with this, their brightest topic.

"Yes, I've had more women in my life than I can remember the names of," said Hughes, staring at the smoke of his pipe. "I suppose that shocks you."

"You mean before your marriage, I suppose?" Tony asked.

"No. Since."

Tony remained thoughtful.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," continued Hughes. "Didn't I say to you the other night that I loved my wife better than any other woman? Well, that stands. That's the gospel truth. She's top-of-the-bill with me—I want you to understand that—the one woman who really matters. But when I'm away from her for a long time, what then, old bird? I don't cease to be attracted by pretty women, and if they are easy fruit, well, I'm afraid I pick 'em; they seem to want me to do this kindness, and I'm very happy to oblige them. Is that very wrong?"

"I dunno," said Tony.

"If it's Nature's game to push me towards them, and them towards me, right-ho! I am very pleased to fall in with her ideas. Suits me down to the ground . . . You see, quite often I take a trip to the States for the good of my firm, and on a ship we are all of us at rather a loose end for something to do. Well, it's emphatically something to do. Once I was on the *Northumbria*, the sister ship to this old hooker, and good lord! the number of women on that voyage that raped me!"

"What!" screamed Tony. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Just what I say: 'raped.' There was no mistaking what they wanted, and Barkis was willing; but, devil take it! I was quite exhausted by the time we made New York."

Tony puckered his brow; and Hughes's voice was kindly.

"That shocks you, O'Grogan, doesn't it?"

After more puckering, Tony said No, because he didn't believe that Hughes felt any guilt about it, but, in his own case, try as he would, he could never do such things without a sense of guilt. It was due to his upbringing, no doubt.

"Exactly," Hughes agreed; "and I like you for it. I can't help it; I always take to you ascetics. But at the same time I've a strong suspicion that asceticism, as a source of unhappiness in marriage, stands pretty high in the list."

"Please explain," Tony smiled.

Very good. Tony was married, was he not, and he would like his marriage to be as perfect as possible. (To which Tony just nodded, and Hughes could never know the sharp old pain that throbbed behind that nod.) Well, a perfect marriage was quite impossible if its main *motif*, the physical one, was badly played; and the art of playing it properly was almost as difficult as the art of playing the violin; it needed training.

and practice. But a husband should have learned his art by no little practice before he was presumptuous enough to attempt the marriage duet; "and I've yet to learn," said Hughes, "why what's good sense for a man isn't good sense for a woman, too. Do you get me, O'Grogan?"

But Tony shook his head; he didn't see that there was so much to learn.

And Hughes laughed. "God help us, O'Grogan! what a child you still are!" he said, and proceeded to enlighten him on many things.

Tony was amazed: amazed that he should have arrived at the twenty-seventh year of his life, and the fourth of his marriage, and have pondered so deeply all along the road, and still be so ignorant of both. And while he knew that, however his brain might accept or resist Hughes Anson's logic, his nature —his blood—could never endorse it—a certain Anglican vicarage in Kensington threw out all its power to hold him back from that—he yet felt grateful to Hughes, as to a spear-head of thought which had the strength to pierce into places from which his own softer and more sentimental thinking recoiled.

Such a conversation is not easily stopped; it filled hour after hour that morning, playing round the head of one of them at least with a disturbing light—a light that was brilliant with interest and yet darkened with discomfort, like the light of an evening when the afterglow has lagged too long. He remembered other such talks ten years ago with old Raking, in green, secluded places by the Thames. Then, abruptly, the officers' mess call guillotined the debate, and they saw the Mediterranean again. The ship had been moving on all the while, taking them away from the places where women were; perhaps away from women for ever.

In the afternoon when the sun appeared to be plumb overhead, Tony, his thoughts still tinted with this conversation, took a writing-block and fountain pen into a shaded recess, and floated happily away along the surface of a letter to Honor.

"*2nd Lieut. A. O'Grogan,*
"*British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force,*
"*August*, 1915.

"*Dearest Honor,*

"*How are you going, and God bless you. Such is my wish, sent with all my heart from a boat I am not at liberty to name,*

sailing in the blue Mediterranean over a spot I may not say where. Dearest, I keep on feeling that my departure from Waterloo was so hurried that I could only say about half of what I felt, but in case through pressure of work, which has at present recoiled pour mieux sauter ('Oui, oui,' says Honor, to show that at least she recognizes the language), I should omit to say it later, let me say it here and now, 'At home or away, in England or out of it, ashore or afloat, you are the elemental fact of my life—absolutely top of its bill—the one thing that really matters. For which take all my thanks.'

"And here, since we are getting a trifle pathetic, we all blow our noses and start afresh.

"I wish you were here with me looking at all the loveliness around. A little while ago we sighted a grey island behind the diaphanous haze, and now as we draw nearer to it, Proximity, like an artist completing the picture, is adding colour and shadow and detail to what was merely a pencilled impression before. He has put white specks on the slopes; they might be spotless sheep, but are really buildings scattered apart. It is a mountainous island, and the shadow between the two highest peaks has become so deep that one can imagine it the hollow crater of a volcano. Oh yes, we are getting nearer and can even see a toy yacht floating with a swan-like grace and whiteness. This elegant plaything is coming in our direction, and what ho! it is a great three-masted, full-rigged sailing ship bearing down upon us——

"I stopped at this point to watch it go by. Against the deep blue of its background its multipled sails had the perfection of a dandy's newly-dressed linen. It headed past our bows and swept round our stern, as though it had skirted us for the whim of the thing. And now it has dwindled away to the west, and become a toy craft again.

"I found myself thinking of Monte Cristo and wondering if his boat was like this white-petalled flower and if yonder was his island.

"It is lovely weather; warm, to be sure; quite warm so that I often use the blotting paper of this writing-block to blot my forehead.

"And there are no parades for the tommies to-day. Too hot. They lie about the decks and joke and sing. A shy fellow with a mandoline has hidden himself in some modest retreat and is thrumming the songs we sang in our last months at home:

"'I'm Gilbert, the Filbert,
The Knut with a K,'

and

"'Roaming in the gloaming
On the banks of the Dardanelles,'

and of course the fellows can't help joining in and the volume of one chorus after another blows over the sea to the mountains yonder, each crossing a more easterly patch—for the boat moves fast.

"It seems to have brought us much nearer to the fight during the last days. We see cruisers hareing along with the noses of their guns outstretched, as if sniffing the trouble in front. And heading the other way come the hospital ships, taking the wounded home. Yesterday one passed very near us, and we could see her upper decks packed with sisters and nurses and V.A.D.s (Isn't the official army word 'sister' wonderful?) These delightful girls never ceased waving their handkerchiefs to our crowd of khaki lads, who returned the greeting somewhat shyly. But when the wounded in the bows of the hospital ship roared out: 'Are we down-hearted?' there was nothing at all shy about our uproarious answer 'No!' I could swear that, in the noise of it, the beautiful white vessel trembled.

"I'm quite anxious to get into the fight, and only hope that this new landing at Suvla Bay won't polish off all the Turks before we can get to Gallipoli. You've read all about the Suvla landing, I suppose: the general feeling is that it'll cut the communications of the Turkish army at Cape Helles and force it to retreat; then our Helles army and our new Suvla army will join up and rush the hills that overlook the Dardanelles; and once we command the forts of the Dardanelles, the Navy can go romping through to Constantinople.

"Yes, we're all very confident; especially the men. By the way, the more I see of these fellows, these simple, common men of England, the more I believe that in days to come I shall be very proud of having been allowed to command them.

"I may write more to-morrow, but good-bye for the present, darling. . . . Write at frightful length."

He put the letter in its envelope and addressed it, writing "On Active Service" along the top; and since an officer could be his own censor, he franked it with his signature in the bottom corner. No stamp was needed. It would arrive in London heavily stamped, "Received from H.M. Ship. No Charge to be Raised," and Tony was secretly pleased to think of Honor seeing such stirring franks and imprints.

A night and a day passed, and in the little Writing-room, under bright electric lamps, Hughes Anson sat at a table

censoring the tommies' letters. As he signed each envelope he tossed it on to a pile of letters on the carpet. At another table sat Wilmington, performing precisely similar actions. Only a wall's thickness separated these two men from the Smoking-room, whence came the noise of young men's voices cheering and singing. One clear young voice sounded above the others, and it cried, "Wait a minute, all!" and there were three seconds of silence, followed by a piano and the clear young voice singing alone:

> "Oh, the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin,
> His boots are crackin'
> For want of blackin'
> And his little baggy trousers they want mendin'
> Before we send him——"

and all together the voices roared: "*To the Dardanelles!*"

> "Oh, the moon shines bright on Mrs. Porter
> And on her daughter——"

But now Tony burst from the deck into the Writing-room and cried to Hughes and Wilmington:

"It's Lemnos, you blighters! Lemnos, my hat! The fabled isle! Why on earth don't you come out and watch?"

"Run away, run away," said Hughes, and explained that he had rashly promised to help out the Lancashire officers with their censoring, since every tommy on the ship had written about half a dozen last letters to-day, confound him; and Tony inwardly observed, as he had observed before, that the unmoral Hughes would very often put himself out to help someone else. Hughes added, with perhaps a sting, that Wilmington, being a gentleman, had come to his assistance. Then from a small pile of letters which he had kept apart from the mass he picked up one and read: "Dear mother, I hope this finds you as it leaves me at present, much better after feeling very sick. I felt like catting hundreds of times during the stormy weather, but managed to keep my food to myself." He put it down, commenting, "There's been no stormy weather." He picked up another: "Dear Mollie, I hope this finds you as it leaves me at present, absolutely in the pink. Well, here we are, practically in sight of the trenches"—("Can you see 'em, O'Grogan?")—"and, crikey! I'm sorry for

any old Turks your loving husband sets his eyes on. Now keep your pecker up, old girl, we ain't going to be long out here, which, since this here Suvla landing, we expect to be over by Christmas, so give my love to our Sis. . . ." This he put down without comment. "And here's another. A religious bloke, this one; I happen to know him, a young giant of about six-foot-six. He is writing to his father. Listen: 'We're just on top of the battle now, Dad, but I mind your last words to me, "All things work together for good to them as love God," and the bit of poetry Mum sent in her last letter, "To lean your head upon the Saviour's breast and thus to journey on. . . ."'"

"Can we see the boom yet?" said Wilmington.

And Tony said, No, they were just rounding a brace of priceless little Hans Andersen islands which, as far as he could see, were doing sentry-go at the entrance to the harbour.

"Well, come and see us again when we're through the boom, and we can pull up the blinds then," said Wilmington.

"Yes," Hughes endorsed, deep in his letters. "Good-bye, and thank you for calling."

And when Tony had retreated with abuse, they heard again the uproar in the Smoking-room, where the chorus of officers was bawling, "Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers."

Perhaps a quarter of an hour went by, and suddenly Hughes swung round in his chair and stood up.

"Well, I've finished," he said. "I think I shall go and get tight."

"So?" inquired Wilmington.

"Yes, Doc. It may be my last respectable blotto . . . or even my last altogether, come to think of it."

"Oh, no, no. That I can't believe," the doctor protested.

"Yes," Hughes affirmed sadly. "It might be—we're getting altogether too close to this disgusting war. Now, this dangerous Gallipoli spot—how far is it from Lemnos?"

"About forty miles."

"Hell! is that all?" He grimaced. "And they put us into little ferry-boats and ferry us there?"

"At ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Or to-night, if it's not too late."

"Well, now, isn't that damnable? . . ."

He was apparently contemplating its damnableness when Tony broke into the room again.

"We're through the boom, children. Up with the blinds and see the sights of Lemnos."

They opened the deadlights, and the lamps of the room illuminated the deck without. It was almost a ceremony, blessing the end of a voyage. Open them up; hurrah! our ship has run the gauntlet of the enemy submarines and is now coming triumphantly into port! Open them up: no submarine can touch us now!

And the opened ports showed them that they were surrounded by lights; shipping lights on a wide stretch of inland water, and innumerable other lights on the rolling hills around.

"'Struth!" exclaimed Hughes.

"Quite a lot of people here," said Tony.

They stood gazing. Instead of being in the hill-locked gulf of a little unwanted island, lost in the Aegean, they might have been in the world's largest harbour, with all the world's shipping at anchor, and the world's largest city rising from the water front.

"J'ever see so many ships?" murmured Hughes.

"No; and what are all the lights ashore?"

"They can't be buildings."

"Camps, with their hurricane lanterns." Hughes, the only one who had been to war, was prompt with his explanation. "Probably Rest Camps and Concentration Camps and Remounts and Ordnance, and God-knows-what-all. Those with the two lights swinging on their masts are the hospitals—damn em."

"We are slowing down, aren't we?"

"Yes, we're going to anchor."

"Hallo! . . ." This was an exclamation from Tony. "Hallo, look! here's a little boat crowded with soldiers. It's coming our way."

"It's the Gallipoli Ferry," said Hughes.

And at the same moment all the young officers came funnelling out of the Smoke-room, and lined along the rails to see and to banter the little Peninsula ferry as she passed. Hughes, Wilmington and Tony hastily joined them. The height of the liner's hull gave them an aeroplane view of the little steamer; they could look down upon her in her completeness—bows and poop, mast and rigging and funnel—as if she was a model in the dimly lit window of a Shipping Office. All her decks were packed with soldiers; and at such a sight the young

officer who had led the chorus in the Smoke-room shouted, "Let her hear from you, boys," and led them in:

"Anybody here seen Kelly? K E Double L Y.
Anybody here seen Kelly? Kelly from the Isle of Man . . ."

which, ceasing and rolling away like smoke over the water, enabled the voices of those on the ferry to be heard. They were singing the last lines of a popular song, "Will you tell your wife in the morning, Who were you with last night?" and the young officers suffered them to sing it to the end before greeting it with the chorus: "What a rotten song! What a rotten song! And what rotten singers, too!" and loud laughter, and shouts of, "You people! Who are you?"

"Kent Yeomanry."

"Oh, you're no good—we'll be along to-morrow and give you a lift."

"Yes, you tell 'em the Lancashires have arrived. Shock troops, what?"

"*And* s'more of the Essex."

"Eh, it's a poor look-out for Johnny Turk now."

"I say, there's three submarines waiting for you outside; we've just seen them."

All the field-glasses were now turned the other way, for the ferry had passed. The leading voice yelled, "Are we down-hearted?" and from over the intervening water came the loud roar, "No!" The leading voice made one last effort to reach her over the lengthening distance, "Well, *au revoir*. Put it across 'em," and from the decks below, where the massed tommies were also firing their broadside of banter, came the last of their shouts, "Well, 'op it, you b——s. Sorry you can't stop."

That was over. The young officers rushed back to the Smoke-room, singing in chorus under their irrepressible leader:

"The echoes are waking on forest and scar,
'Tis Angus my own coming home from the *wab!*
'Tis Angus my own . . . Angus my own. . . ."

and so were gone. Tony, Hughes and Wilmington returned to the Writing-room.

"What happens next?" asked Tony.

"The M.L.O." said Hughes.

"Which is—— ?" inquired Tony.

"The Military Landing Officer. He tells us where our Divisions are, and details us to the ferries—the unfeeling brute! Damn! I think I will go and get a bit of a glow up. . . . No, you needn't stand to attention. Stand at ease."

There was a restlessness on the ship that night, a coming and going around the blackboard of notices outside the Purser's Office, and, between these visits, an uneasy killing of time. Some drank and made merry; some wrote letters; some played cards rather silently. Others packed. A padre held a hymn-singing service on the foc'sle among the men, and appeared to be enjoying a success beyond anything he had achieved during the voyage. Tony, as all the others, was aware of an emptiness within, and an excited trembling which forbade him to be still or inactive. And at last, near ten o'clock, Orders appeared on the blackboard, long, closely-typed sheets of Orders; and one could scarcely approach them for the crowd. Into Tony they shot a little arrow that left a worrying wound. As a supernumerary officer of the Lancashires, he was not to proceed with his brigade; he was seconded instead to the Essex Division and would proceed with their drafts in the morning.

Not to go with his own battalion! To have to join some rotten new division, and be the nervous "new boy" all over again! Oh, damn! As all people do in such moments, he sought for the names of his friends to see what the powers had done for them. This brought comfort, for Orders reminded him that Hughes Anson was one of the Royal West Essex. Oh, well, perhaps he would be able to get into the same battalion with Rosy: Rosy would be his bear-leader at the new school. And Wilmington, what of him? Wilmington, as an unattached M.O., was to report to the D.A.D.M.S., 162nd Division, Cape Helles. Same division, anyhow. Ah, he and Wilmington could at least travel to Cape Helles together. "Two days' Iron Rations and water-bottles to be full on arrival," said Orders. H'm, didn't sound as comfy as the ship's Dining Saloon.

So the next morning Tony, who must wait for a later ferry, was standing by the deck-rail and watching the men of his old brigade file down the gangway on to a little steamer, which had lashed itself against the huge troopship. Like a catalyst the M.L.O. had come aboard and spread this disintegration. The men, loaded with equipment, packs and overcoats, stumbled

down the narrow decline and on to the new deck, casting back jibes and laughter.

"Eh, but we're real soldiers now, lads. . . ."

"Eh, we're *for* it now, alreet. . . . T' half of us'll be dead this time to-morrow, tha knows. . . ."

"Well, hell's already full of Germans, so there won't be no room for us. . . ."

"Good old British Empire!"

"What do I care for the British Empire? I'd sell it for five bob. . . ."

"Aye, so would I, and all. . . ."

"Yah! British Empire's no bloody good; getting us potted at by Turks like this! . . ."

"Any more for the *Skylark?* . . ."

"Coom along, th' lads! Toopence t' ride t' Helles. . . ."

"It's a far, far better thing I do now than I have ever done——"

"Eh, get a move on, choom! Your King and Country needs you——"

"——and I go to a far, far better rest than I have ever known. . . ."

"Any more for the *Skylark?* 'Tain't Owdham wakes every day. What's good o' coming t' Blackpool if tha doan't enjoy tha'self. . . ."

"*Gott strafe England!*"—this from a lance-corporal who had got his equipment entangled with a cleat; "Gaw, this is war, this is! . . ."

"Aye, I *have* got wind oop, and all; it's better nor a dose o' salts this is. . . ."

"Here! *hold* that shovin'! . . ."

"Coom on, Sweeney, lad; taxi's at t' door; no swinging the lead now; tha's asked for this, tha knows. . . ."

"Look at 'im! why didn't he bring his bloody bedstead as well?"

"'Ere! give us room, mate; I've paid my passage as well as you."

The boat was full; as crammed with soldiers as a market cart is crammed with potatoes; the shrouds shot upwards from a tumbled soil of pith helmets. Her siren shrieked, her engines chunked, her crew unlashed her, and she laboured away, the men bellowing to those still left on the liner, "Eh, you scrimshankers! You come along too and do your bit. . . ."

"Goo'-bye. . . ." "Gaw! it ain't 'alf rough aht here. . . ." "Goo-bye-*ee!* Goo-bye-*ee!*"

Well away now, she had become, like her sister of the night before, a little model steamer from the window of a Shipping Office.

More boats came and carried off the remainder of Tony's brigade and some of the Essex too, Hughes Anson among them. Then a quiet. Wilmington and Tony, as unattached officers, turned about and, going indoors, found themselves on a troopship nearly empty, its stewards sweeping away the last traces of the men who had been here. The alleyways were littered with sheets pulled off the bunks of departed guests. On the notice-board outside the Purser's Office the sheaves of Orders still hung, though curling up in the heat; and precious little meaning they seemed to have now; they had been obeyed, and their readers were gone. A blackboard lolled against the door of the Lounge, giving the results of yesterday's Sweep. And the Lounge itself was as melancholy as a stage-set when the play's over and the curtain down.

"Cigarette?" offered Tony.

"Thanks," said Wilmington.

They sat down; and the smoke lifted from their cigarettes; and it was the only thing happening in the Lounge.

"Doc," said Tony at last: he was thinking of the way the men had left the ship, in no high Roman fashion, but in an odd way of their own, jesting and half ashamed.

"Yes," Wilmington encouraged him.

But Tony did not speak at once. The Irishman in him wanted to speak—to burst out in a really emotional utterance, but his good English censor was sitting on the trap-door, whispering, "It simply isn't done. Haven't you just seen that it isn't? If you speak, you'll be doing the very opposite of that which you admire. Lie down, lie down." None the less the Irishman burst up.

"Doc," said he, "what have we really come to fight for? It's not exactly the Empire. . . . I've an idea that England isn't fighting for the Empire so much as the Empire—in a foggy kind of way—is fighting for England."

Wilmington frowned at the smoke of his cigarette, but since politeness seemed to demand an answer, began: "My own view——"

But Tony was not interested in the doctor's view; he wanted

to state his own; and his eyes were staring ahead of him. "Doc, don't you feel that the English have entered this war in a different sort of mood from any other in history. I'm always feeling it. I mean: I get a feeling that they've gone into it, not so much to inflict pain on their enemies as to take it alongside of their friends——"

The doctor scoffed this out of court—with one rude word.

"Well, the best of them have, at any rate," pursued Tony. "Not so much to strike blows at Germany or Turkey, as to take them for England, since they're bobbing about everywhere. . . ."

"But wait——" Wilmington began.

"And by 'England' I mean"—Tony shrugged in the difficulty of expressing himself—"something that she stands for—despite all her faults—and something that seems worth suffering for. . . . I was trying to get it all into a poem the other night, but failed. The idea's so damned elusive. My idea was, I think, that we fought for England, not because she was a huge Empire, but for the very opposite reason—because she was a very little country, with hedgerows and cottages and cow-byres and little churches—a country where—probably because it was all so small and neighbourly—they had raised a tradition of toleration and liberty . . . and humour and kindliness . . . and—and trustworthiness. But I couldn't get beyond the opening lines, which went:

> 'Here fight I for England. Why, God knows!
> Her byres and her hedgerows know,
> And all her gentle hills. . . .'"

"But——" began Wilmington.

"And this particular Gallipoli business, Doc—interrupting you for a moment—this particular Gallipoli stunt has absolutely *got* me. It's so—it's so wonderful. Gallipoli is the one bloody inspiration we've had. On the Western front we're absolutely held by the Germans; but, by gad! only let us storm away to Constantinople through the Dardanelles, and we shall—we shall do everything: we shall cut the road to India, we shall solve Egypt and Mespot, we shall knock Turkey out of the war, we shall—we shall save Russia and bring in all the Balkans on our side, and put the final breeze up Austria and —and—and end the war. And so when our army managed to defy all the laws of probability, and land on Cape Helles, well,

my God! I'd have moved heaven and earth to be able to get there! and look, here I am, waiting for a boat to take me there, and I shall be there to-night!"

"And now," said Wilmington, "suppose you let me have a go."

"I'm beastly sorry," said Tony, abashed. "Have I been talking about myself? I say, I'm frightfully sorry."

"Well, I was only going to say that, for my part, I hadn't thought out any of these things. I only know—as I told you the other day—though why people talk to you like this I can't make out—that it's rather decent to be needed somewhere, and to have given up something to get there."

Tony nodded in appreciation. "Yes, I suppose it is. . . . *I'm* giving up nothing really. You see, I wanted to go from the first. And incidentally I'm getting a much better salary than I had as a prep-school master. D'you know, I can't read the letters in the papers about war profiteers, I feel such a profiteer myself. With my pay, and Field and Fuel and Light allowances, I shall draw over three hundred pounds a year."

"So much?" laughed Wilmington.

"Yes, but I've never had much, you see. Parsons' sons don't."

"No, I suppose not."

"I wonder if we shall see old Rosy Hughes again."

"Probably."

"Hope so."

There was silence.

"Well, I'll be packing my valise, I think," said Wilmington, rising.

Tony rose too. "So'll I. And I say, Doc, 'Two days' Iron Rations and water-bottles full!'"

"It sounds ominous," said the Doc.

CHAPTER III

ACTIVE SERVICE

A TRAWLER carried Wilmington and Tony to the Gallipoli Peninsula, a dirty little snuffing trawler from Grimsby. Trawler 294. It puffed out of Lemnos, with the harbour still dark, but day coming grey in the offing. And as the bright August morning swept over the sea, they saw that the trawler was heading for a little hilly island, Imbros; and Tony looked eagerly towards it, for here in his H.Q. sat the Commander-in-Chief, watching over the water his battles on Gallipoli. They were quickly beneath its hills, in a little open bay, where two cruisers floated at anchor, and some ferries and trawlers, and a monitor—perhaps the very one that had passed them in the Mediterranean. Ashore were the tents of the Great Men, and Tony stared at them. He hoped, maybe, that he might see the great Sir Ian Hamilton himself walking in contemplation, up and down, up and down, before a mess orderly rang him to breakfast with a clapper and a shell-case gong. On the cliff-head was a hangar of brilliant green tarpaulin; and out of its doors, soon after they had entered the bay, an airship floated, to hover gracefully over the shipping.

They took some officers and "Other Ranks" aboard, and turned their bows to the east. Now they were facing Gallipoli itself: there in the pearly mist, only seven miles ahead, rolled the hills of that terrible land. How peaceful she seemed, lying low and gentle in her sparkling seas! But look, hard behind her sweep of hills, there was a second land, with a vaguer outline switchbacking along the whole width of the sky; and instantly this brought home to Tony the narrowness of the Gallipoli Peninsula and of the Dardanelles Straits beyond, for this was the face of Asia. Gallipoli in a panorama before him! He remembered a July day in England, when he had

read Sir Ian's narrative of the far-away army that had stormed Gallipoli from the sea; of that old collier, the *River Clyde*, grounding on V Beach with her hold full of men; of the Lancashires rushing through the blizzard of bullets up the slope of W Beach; and of the Australians and New Zealanders charging up the hills of Anzac Cove "straight at their bayonets." He remembered an hour in the Mediterranean when they had heard the tale of the Suvla landing—more and more British divisions coming out of the sea to join hands with the Anzacs and attempt the hills above—oh, which of those infolding bays was Suvla, and which of those shadowed ravines was Anzac Cove?—and as he deliberately recreated these moments, and the eager desire that had come upon him then to gaze upon the sites of the battles, he shut his eyes and imagined himself being transported by an Arabian genie over the thousands of miles—now he opened his eyes—to a ship in the Aegean that was flying towards his desire.

While he was thus meditating, the tenour of his thoughts was interrupted and the men on the trawler wrought to a talkative excitement by the passing, not a cable's-length away, of a Turkish floating mine. It was a huge black iron ball bristling with spikes, like the head of a giant's club. No doubt it had come drifting from the Narrows, let loose that it might take its chance of winning anything from a warship of 1,000 souls to a trawler with 2nd Lieutenant O'Grogan aboard. The skipper on his bridge put the helm so that his vessel veered away from the mine; and he moved the lever to "Stop." The trawler hung like a cork on the slightly-moving water. The mine had swept past her quarter and was already a little distance away. The soldiers on board loaded their rifles and, resting them on the gunwale, took aim. The ship's company, who all had ancient rifles, hurried to get them and took up good snipers' posts. The officer passengers, eager to be in the game, borrowed rifles and made good practice. The skipper on his bridge, enjoying himself thoroughly, shot in an erect position, as if his target was a sitting pheasant. Soon the trawler was spitting rapid-fire from a score of barrels; and some of the shooting was excellent, hitting the mine and rocking it, and other shooting, especially Wilmington's—who, by the way, shouldn't have been firing at all, since he was a non-combatant—was abominable, sending its bullets miles over the surface of the sea.

Every minute the mine was increasing the distance they had to shoot. But the best traditions of the sea are offensive and not defensive, to pursue the enemy and to send him to the bottom; so the skipper, taking his right hand from the trigger, moved his lever to "Half-speed Ahead," and put the helm hard over so that his ship turned and gave chase to the enemy. And a flag was run up the mast to signal to destroyers at Imbros of the menace afloat. A soldier, having gaped at this signal, muttered, "England expects every man this day to do his duty," and adjusted the sights of his rifle. When the trawler was again within a safe distance of the mine, the lever-bell rang, the arrow-head pointed to "Stop" and His Majesty's Trawler 294 again sent her broadside at the enemy. Many more bullets won home; and amid a chorus of laughing cheers the mine was seen to be sinking. A few more shots were fired by those who had got their eyes in and didn't want to stop; and then the target was no longer visible. The trawler hauled down its signal, while all aboard congratulated themselves on this glorious sea-victory, and this fresh assurance that the spirit of Nelson was not dead, even on a dirty little trawler.

And now to Gallipoli and W Beach, the beach up which the Lancashires rushed. "No finer feat of arms," the enthusiastic Sir Ian had written, "has ever been achieved than the storming of W Beach from open boats." One could only wait to see it, silent in suspense. Oh, my God, here it was; and one's heart hurt: the half-circle of water met a cliff on its left, a gentle incline straight ahead, and a steep slope on its right. And its water was still filled with sunken and rotting barges that had conveyed the men of Lancashire ashore. They couldn't in the hail-storm of bullets have scaled this impossible cliff, and only a few could have climbed that difficult slope; it must have been up yonder rise that they rushed; it was the natural route from the sea to the plateau. Oh God! . . . Well . . . Tony looked over the trawler's side, down through the clear water, to see if there were rusty iron, coils of barbed wire, shell cases, or even dead men, upon the sea's bed. There was nothing. Lifting his face, he saw, in a conjured vision, this same water being thrashed by the bullets; and the beach and the earth being hurtled into the air by shells, and the high ground clouding with brown smoke under the bombardment of the Navy, and all the air a-shower with shrapnel and nose-caps and splinters and debris. . . . Ah well . . .

He would have changed places with no man to-day; all stay-at-home people seemed to him luckless folk; theirs the murk, his the sparkle and glitter: was he not standing in a trawler, off W Beach, Cape Helles?

A jetty had been improvised by the partial submerging of old trawlers and barges; and here they disembarked, and tramped over it into the busy population of Lancashire Landing. Their task was to find the M.L.O., and they found him in a little square room built of sandbags—one of many such, honeycombed round the amphitheatre of W Beach. He was a middle-aged man with a blue brassard on his arm.

"The Essex? Oh, yes, they are here somewhere or other. I'll give you a guide sometime or other. But I can't do it now. Busy just now. . . . No, there's no hurry. This show's going on for months yet. . . . Absolutely no hurry; nothing's happening on the Peninsula nowadays. You have a good look round and come back at, say, two o'clock, when I may be able to do something with you. The Essex? Yes, they're Krithia Nullah way, I think; you'll have to go along Princes Street to Clapham Junction. And look here, you may as well draw some rations. Here's a chit. . . . Right-ho. Good-bye. Walters, what about that canteen stuff?"

Wilmington and Tony came away, and for want of anything else to do, went to the appointed place for drawing rations. It was a cubiform store or shop whose four walls and counter were built by the accepted method of piling full ration-crates one upon another, as brick upon brick. The men at the counter lived behind walls of corned beef, biscuits, desiccated vegetables and Ideal Milk. Here at last was the house of one's fairy-tales, whose walls were built of food. Wilmington and Tony were given each about half a pound of tea, a quarter of a pound of sugar, a handful of army biscuits, a tin of marmalade, a tin of milk, a tin of bully, a cutting of bacon, a fistful of rice, a chunk of cheese, some firewood, and a page of the *Daily Mirror* full of raisins. They were not clear what to do with it all, but supposed that things were done like this on the Peninsula; and Tony opened his kitbag on a low sand-dune, and shot the things into it; so that for months afterwards dirty grains of rice, errant tea leaves and adhesive raisin pips made that bag an offence to his groping hand.

What next? Already the sun had become atrociously hot, making the sweat stream from under their helmets and the

flies come in squadrons to visit it. God knew where the dust had come from, but it was coating their lips, tongues and eyelids. Their bodies cried for coolness and water, and when Wilmington perceived a little distance away some men bathing, he was not slow to indicate them to his companion. Now, the two arms of the little cove known as W Beach are Cape Tekke to the west and the immortal Cape Helles to the east, and it was under Cape Helles that the men were bathing, that August day of 1915. No man but would wish to say that he had bathed off Cape Helles, so away went the two friends along the beaten track to the site of this pastime. And the little spit of rocks which they chose for their disrobing place, all those years ago, was surely the spot where, in the peaceful days before the war, the youngest Turks from Seddul Bahr would wander in search of play. Such fine slabs of sea-washed rock there were, on which they could lie and be lapped by the water; such jagged crags behind which they could cry their Turkish peep-bo; such nestling pools where they could splash with their brown feet. One wonders if they are playing there now.

Tony had not been swimming long when a deafening explosion on the shore caused him to find his feet hurriedly and stare in its direction. And as he stared at the brown balloon of smoke ascending, so it appeared, from the very place where he had set his kitbag not fifteen minutes before, *look out!* there came the whining whistle of another shell. It detonated on almost the same spot, and threw up more smoke to float over the dug-outs and tents of W Beach. Another whistle and another detonation. Bits of boxes shot up with the smoke into the air. A line of tethered mules got restive and strained at their ropes. Some whinnied. A few with a movement laughably human lay down and forbore to neigh. And Tony, standing there in the water, was agreeably surprised to find that his interest in seeing where the shells would explode was strong enough to make him forget to be afraid. Not quite realizing his danger, nor worrying what was toward, he stood there with the water up to his waist and enjoyed so remarkable an experience. He studied the behaviour of the men ashore. They had not the least false shame about scattering to cover. And what absurd cover many of them sought; anything so long as there was *something* between them and the onrushing shells! They ran into bell tents, they hid behind a tuft of scrub, they crouched behind the single post of a barbed-wire

railing. And most of the bareheaded men, observed Tony, hastily put on their pith helmets.

Another shell and another; and wonderful levellers they were, these Turkish shells. Tony saw a Brigadier-General fling himself into a funk-hole while two orderlies apparently flung themselves on top of him. A medical officer, his orderlies, and the whole of his Sick Parade ran altogether, in a spirit of perfect equality, into the doctor's dug-out. And as the noise of an explosion rolled away a private cracked a joke with an officer whom, in a normal moment, he would not have addressed without the aid of an N.C.O.

Tony was amused, too, at his own reaction. Strange how, once familiar with that distant boom, he would hear it the next time, instantly and instinctively, while nearer and louder noises receded from consciousness; how then he would hear only the oncoming whine, to the exclusion of all other sounds like the neighing of mules or the raised voices of men; how then, as the whine became a train's roar, he would dip down in the water to give the thing room to pass. It exploded on the beach somewhere, and its detonation was all that the brain recorded; but immediately afterwards the surrounding noises leapt back into the foreground of consciousness: there came the laughter of men: "Gawd! I'm all in a muck-sweat. . . ." "*That* puts the fear o' God into you, don't it? . . ." "Ow, I never *was* a soldier and I want me mother. . . ." "Rotten shot, Johnny! Try again, and see if you can't get your penny back"—and the voice of a man singing as he rose from cover for the fifth time, "Bobbing up and down like this, Bobbing up and down like this. . . ." And these things seemed extraordinarily funny, after a shell had just missed everybody. Tony yelled with laughter. Laughter was cheap at such a moment.

A steady, a deliberate, nay, an exaggerated cachinnation of laughter drew his eyes to the rocks; and there stood Wilmington, who had long ago left the water, and was now watching Tony "bobbing up and down like this" in water as high as his waist. Tony realized how foolish he must have looked, and was making haste to bring himself and his blushes ashore, when a loud explosion shattered the air behind him. Glancing round, he saw a cloud of smoke leaving the side of a warship which had just appeared off the Cape. This British cruiser, standing remarkably close in shore, was acknowledging the

receipt of the Turkish messages, and her prompt reply was most inspiring. As the tongues of flame shot from her guns he found himself saying aloud and exultantly, "That's the stuff to give 'em! Pump it over!" And she pumped it over towards Achi Baba with such address that the shriek of one shell had not died away before the next had gone shrieking after it. "That's right! Keep it up! *And* some more!" The eager words came trembling from his lips—so like the boxing matches at school was this international tourney. And he remained standing at attention in the water, till recalled to his senses by Wilmington.

"Well, that's the most remarkable bathe I've ever had," said he, paddling ashore.

At two o'clock they returned to their appointment with the M.L.O., and found him standing outside his door in parley with a corporal. On seeing them he said: "Oh lord! . . . H'm . . ." as if he had forgotten all about them. "Oh, yes . . . *you* . . . yes, I've had a message about one of you . . . O'—O'Gorgon . . . you're going to the 15th Royal West Essex, Four Eight Six Brigade . . . they don't seem to know what to do with the Mo"—"Mo" was the M.L.O.'s short way of saying "Medical Officer" or "M.O.," for he was a busy man—"but he's to report to Division."

Just then they saw the queerest little figure approaching down the beaten path: a short, slight, little man, yet not thin, since he was bigger below the waist than above it; he was untidily dressed in gum-boots, slacks, and an old drill jacket, yet apparently he was an officer, since he wore a soft collar and tie; but nowhere was there a star or a crown to indicate his rank. He didn't even wear a Sam Browne belt. His eyes jutted out like those of a protesting fish before its death; and so did his mouth; it reminded one of a fish with jaws agape after the hook has been removed. And yet—how was it?—he was not unprepossessing: rather did he command an instant, if humorous, liking; as you saw him you said at once that his bark was one thing—probably a terrible thing—and his bite quite another.

The M.L.O. saw him too and exclaimed: "Ah! The very man! Here you are, you two; here's a guide. *That*, if you please, is the Four Eight Six Brigade padre—you wouldn't

think so to look at him, would you?—you'd think him one of the Sanitary Squad. Padre!" he called, but the padre didn't answer, having got into an apparently wrathful conversation with a high-placed, red-tabbed officer. "He's probably come for some mess stores," explained the M.L.O. "He's Mess Secretary for Brigade Headquarters. Or he may have come to get his ticket for England. Once a week when his Brigadier or Staff Captain refuses to allow him to do something he wants to do—have Holy Communion in the front trenches, or something—he threatens to go home to England, where he can do a job of work. But he never seems to go; they stroke him down. Padre!—No, it's no good; he's ticking off Colonel Field. He's the only padre I've ever met who insults generals and privates alike. . . . *We* daren't do it. . . . Padre, damn you, come here."

The little man, having finished with the Colonel, paddled towards them in his gum-boots.

"Padre, here are two officers, one for D.H.Q. and one for B.H.Q. Will you take 'em back with you? Gentlemen, this is Captain Quickshaw."

"How often have I told you not to call me 'Captain'?" Quickshaw snapped.

"Oh, well, *Mr.* Quickshaw, then—*Padre* Quickshaw, anything you like. This is—er—what?—oh, *Wilmington*, yes—Lieutenant Wilmington, a Mo; and this is—er—O'—O'Gorham, attached to the 15th R.W.E.s."

Quickshaw nodded to them without a trace of goodwill.

"Just come from Lemnos, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, but we put into Imbros on the way," said Tony.

"Oh, you went to Imbros, did you? You didn't think, I suppose, to bring any fresh fruit and vegetables, or wines, from there?"

They admitted they hadn't thought of it.

"Or some eggs," added the padre vaguely. . . . "Damn, I wish I'd known you'd been coming through Imbros. The Brigadier'll get properly peevish if he has any more dried vegetables, and he's sniffy enough at any time, God knows."

"He *is*, Padre," agreed the M.L.O.

"Yes, but I shan't stand it much longer," Quickshaw announced; "and I told him so this morning. I didn't leave my job in England to come and look after a third-rate General's stomach."

"No, of course not, Padre," smiled the M.L.O. "Hell, no! Don't you stand it."

"I shan't. And there'll be more trouble to-night. I've just come for some mess stores, and of course the damn things haven't come. The old general'll sniff when I tell him, and he'll just sniff once too often. Let him sniff, and right-ho! very good! I shall at once bring in all the mess accounts and tell him to get on with it himself. *I* don't want the job."

"No, of course not, Padre. Who would? . . . but look here, can you take the Mo to D.H.Q. and O'—O'Whatever-he-is to B.H.Q.?"

"To Divisional Headquarters. Yes, I can, if I must, I suppose; but I loathe setting foot in the place. Lot of red-tabs sitting on their behinds in funk-holes! Doing nothing but make a thundering mess of the whole campaign! *And* with a French cook! *Paw!*" For the first time the padre laughed. "The atmosphere of the place stifles me——"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. But can you take these officers?"

"I'm going that way. They can come if they want to, I suppose. . . . Come on, *you*." This to Wilmington. "And you too, if you're coming." This to Tony.

"What about the kit?" asked Tony.

"Oh, the kit'll be brought up by a Zionist," said Quickshaw.

"I see," said Tony, who didn't see at all. He wasn't even sure if he had caught the word correctly.

"We may as well go over the plateau," the padre suggested. "It's quite safe. There's nothing on earth happening on Gallipoli now. We've made every mistake we possibly could, and now we're resting on our laurels."

They ascended to the Gallipoli uplands by the natural gradient, Tony secretly thrilled to think that he was treading in the steps of the men who had rushed ashore in the great April landing, and eager to see all that would come into view when they reached the higher ground. What came into view was a narrow scrub-covered plateau undulating away to the north where it finished in a low hill—no, hardly a hill—a tilt in the ground, sloping easily to the skyline.

"That's Achi Baba," said Quickshaw.

"Heavens! Is it?" exclaimed Tony, gripped with interest.

"Yes. You'd think the British Empire could take it, wouldn't you? But they haven't yet, and they won't either."

"Oh, yes, they will," laughed Wilmington.

"Will they? Thump!" said Quickshaw; which was the soldiers' way of saying, No, they wouldn't.

On their right was a large cemetery, an acre of wooden crosses; and Tony, to whom all things were new, suggested a closer examination.

"Cemeteries!" scoffed Padre Quickshaw. "You'll see all the graves you want to before you've finished here. Probably you'll fill one yourself. You'll pass a few hundreds between here and Brigade."

"All right," said Tony, consenting to follow. "And, I say, what is a—a Zionist?"

"Zion Mule Corps," answered Quickshaw tersely. "A dreadful smelly lot of cut-throats, collected from Syria or somewhere to act as transport. They trapes about with mules and gharries. Low-grade Jews, all of them."

"Any good, are they?" asked Wilmington.

"Not bad," Quickshaw allowed.

There was no exaggeration in Quickshaw's word about the graves. They were passing them always. And many thoughts they stirred in Tony, who either stopped deliberately and studied their inscriptions, or cast at them quick and guilty glances over his shoulder. On and about these graves that strong vein of sentiment which the English soldier would never speak aloud had poured itself with simplicity and without shame. Whenever possible he had dug the lonely grave of his friend under a tree, as if he wished the sleeper to have all the shade and beauty he could give him; but most of the trees were thrown or splintered now. Often he had outlined the grave with shell-caps or cigarette tins, and sometimes he had laid the dead man's Wolseley helmet above his breast. And never had he conceived that one could put anything but a cross at the head of a grave; and seldom had he failed to pencil on the cross the letters "R.I.P.," which probably carried no hint of Latin and Popery to his mind, but stood for the English words "Rest in Peace." His wooden crosses stood over all: over his English mates, his Gurkha friends, his Turkish foes who had died in his hands, and even over his favourite dogs and horses. There was one grave on whose cross a British hand had cut the crescent of the enemy—odd mixture!—and the inscription, "A gallant Turk who died in defence of his country. R.I.P."

Wilmington, examining one of these crosses, got left behind;

and Tony took the opportunity to tell Quickshaw what an excellent fellow the Mo was, and how he had left about ten thousand pounds a year so that he might go where there was a crying need for him.

"And what does he think of his reception?" asked Quickshaw.

"How do you mean?"

"Did they welcome him with open arms?"

"Not exactly."

"No. We most of us hurried out here thinking we were badly needed, and lo and behold, our first impression when we arrived on the Peninsula was that no one cared a damn whether we came or stayed away."

"Yes, that was rather my impression," admitted Tony.

"*I* shan't go on with it much longer," said Quickshaw, working up some indignation. "I told 'em so. Either they let me do some work, and do it more or less as I want, or back I go to my parish where there's plenty waiting. It wouldn't break my heart to leave this poisonous spot."

"Could you go if you wanted to?"

"Yes, I only signed on for a year to begin with."

"Wouldn't they think it rather—well—rather *thin* of you to go off and leave them?"

"What do I care what they think? *Paw!*" Quickshaw drew out a soiled khaki handkerchief and wiped his mouth, which was getting very moist. "I'm ready to be killed here for doing a man's job in the trenches, but I'm not going to be killed for sitting on my behind in Brigade Headquarters. Not on your life!"

"Quite," Tony endorsed.

They had been walking about an hour through the scrub and the heather when abruptly they found themselves on the rim of a deep ravine. So far down was its floor and so near its opposite side that it seemed like a fissure in Earth's crust left by some ancient earthquake. Actually it was a canyon cut by water, but bone-dry in these hot summer months. The men walking or riding in its bottom were in about the same relation to its high walls as mice to the walls of a fire-trench.

Quickshaw introduced it to them. "The Gully Ravine."

They went down its wall by a zigzag path—"The Zigzag" was its official name, painted on a signpost—and from this

road they could see a long vista of the gorge. Manifestly it offered the finest concealment from Achi Baba ; with the result that, where its walls were slopes of earth and scrub, instead of white cliffs, they were veined with crude paths and honeycombed with the dug-outs of the British. And all up this long ravine, as all across the plateau above, were little groups of crosses and little lonely graves. Dotted among the dug-outs of the living were the dug-outs of the dead. Truly men who at home would have shuddered before they spent the night in a cemetery may be said to have slept in one big haphazard cemetery every time they laid down to rest on Gallipoli.

Not far from the foot of the " Zigzag " was Brigade Headquarters, a chain of huts built of sacking and wood, with a bell-tent or two ; and Quickshaw was just going towards them when Wilmington reminded him that it was Division that he wanted and not Brigade.

" Oh, God, yes," said the padre. " I'd forgotten about you. Well, Division's not far along the Gully. We'll get rid of you first."

They were walking along the Gully, Tony and Wilmington a little apprehensive of the spent bullets which were sighing and whining through the air, and impinging in the soft earth, but Quickshaw apparently indifferent to them. They had gone but a little way when they met a man laden with sandbags of rations, one over his shoulder, one under his arm, and a third hung from his fingers. It was an extremely awkward lading of his cargo, and just as he drew near the three officers, all the bully-beef and the Maconochie tins from the bag under his arm disgorged themselves, with a prolonged vomit, on to the road. Then the man's rain of oaths was yet more prolonged than the decanting of the bully-beef tins : he emptied himself of all the soldiers' terms for procreation, sexual inversion, and visceral elimination, and, quitting physiology, alluded to his Saviour and to hell.

Padre Quickshaw angrily halted. Staring at the man out of those eyes of his that protruded as in a goitre, he spat and stammered his rebuke. " I can stand a good deal of foul language," said he, " but there's such a thing as going too far. Some sort of self-control is necessary, damn it all. For pity's sake cut out the blasphemies. Here you are, on this damned Peninsula, and any moment a shell-splinter may send you into the presence of your Maker, with His name befouled on

your mouth. It's not good enough. It simply isn't good enough."

That same second, by an astonishing coincidence, there came the *ziff* of a spent bullet, and the man gave a cry of pain, dropped all his bags, and shot the bleeding knuckles of his right hand to his mouth.

"There!" said Padre Quickshaw. "There you are! I told you so!" Apparently his first response to this episode was a satisfaction at such a shining corroboration of his argument. "Are you hurt much?"

"Nah, it's nothin', sir," said the man. "It's only a scratch."

"Let's have a look at it. H'm. Damn nasty scratch. You can't carry all that stuff now."

"Ow, yes, I can, sir. I can carry it with me other 'and. . . . It's nothin'."

"Well, give us your First Field Dressing, and I'll bind it up."

The man produced the dressing from under the right flap of his jacket.

"You're Fred Roberts, aren't you?" asked Quickshaw, as he bound up the wound.

"Yussir."

"How's your young brother?"

"Dicky? Oh, he's all right, sir. In the pink when I last sor 'im this mornin'."

Quickshaw turned to Tony.

"This is one of your lads, O'Grogan. Fred Roberts: one of the 15th Royal West Essex."

"Oh, yes?" acknowledged Tony, and he tried to smile agreeably at the "lad," who was about forty. "I expect we shall get to know each other, Roberts."

"Yes, sir," said Fred Roberts.

Tony was not a little moved by the man's face, and attracted by it. It was such a typically London face, with its short broad nose, its strong delimited moustache, its skin so fundamentally fair beneath the weathering and the mottling, and its hair darker than such a skin suggested, and worn rather long for a soldier, and inclined to fall over the brow: just the face one would expect to see above a muffler in a London street. It was characteristic of Tony that he should immediately use this man, Fred Roberts, as a doorway to many thoughts: this man who had cursed and grumbled over a little trouble and instantly

made light of a bigger one; whose expression at the moment so moved to pity—a sad and moidered expression, as if he accepted what he could not understand. One had seen the same expression in hospitals at home, or in a street-ambulance after an accident. Tony's heart went out to Fred Roberts in a frustrated compassion, as it might to a dog or a child in pain. And he opened a short conversation with him, and, learning that he worked on the railway in Southend along with his brother Dicky, was pleased to find that he had a point of contact with him, for he could ask him if he knew St. Blaise's church, where his sister Peggy was the Vicar's wife. And Fred Roberts answered with a grin that he knew the church, but its outside only.

"Yes," agreed Quickshaw. "Fred never went to church in his life, so long as it was behind a wall and he had to go through a door to it; but now that he finds that it has come into the trenches to his very elbow, he consents to attend sometimes—don't you, Fred?"

"Well yes I do, sometimes, sir," admitted Fred, perhaps a little ashamed. Embarrassed, he picked up his bags to go.

"Here! You can't manage all that junk now," said Quickshaw.

"Oh, yes, I can, sir. It's nothing much."

"Don't be more of a fool than you can help, Roberts! Of course you can't carry it all. Look here, I'll take one of these." He picked up a sack of rations. "Where's it for?"

"C Company, sir, in Trolley Ravine."

"Well, I shall probably be coming that way with this officer. I'll bring it along."

"No, sir. You can't, sir——"

"Well, then, when I'm tired of it, I'll find someone to carry it for me. I'll get it up; don't be afraid."

"Right, sir."

"Good-bye, then. And for God's sake cut out the blasphemy," added Quickshaw, returning to his attack. "Stick to 'bloody.'"

"Yessir."

"'Yessir' be hanged! You know you won't do it. Good-bye."

This friendly-quarrelsome encounter over, the officers pursued their road, Quickshaw cuddling the clumsy sack of rations under his arm. Soon they found D.H.Q., a hamlet

of truly splendid bomb-proof dug-outs, terraced up a sloping side of the ravine. A tall, jolly staff officer—one guessed him to be G.S.O.1—stood at the door of his office and recognized Quickshaw.

"Mary, Mother of God!" he cried to someone inside. "Look out! Look out everybody! Here's Padre Quickshaw."

And another officer in a glorious gold-braided hat immediately looked out.

"God, so it is!" said he. "Well, we're *for* it now. What have we done?"

"Oh, and he's brought us a sack of comforts, I do believe," said the first officer. "Well, now; did you ever?"

"No, those are mess stores for his Brigadier," corrected the second. "'Feed the brute'—*what*, padre?"

"No, it's loot. Padre's been looting and he'll have to be shot. Pity; because he's a decent fellow on the whole."

Tony turned towards Quickshaw's profile, and saw that it was almost registering a grin. But the padre only said: "*Poof!* that's their idea of humour. I've not much use for it, meself."

Yet a third officer came out to entertain his eyes with a sight of Padre Quickshaw; and this was none other than D.A.D.M.S. himself, so Tony was able to witness the interview between him and Wilmington. It was simple and brief. Wilmington explained that he had been ordered to report here. The D.A.D.M.S. said: "Oh, dammit, we've had more doctors sent out lately than we know what to do with . . . *I* don't know where to put you." And he pondered over his trouble for some time. "Can you play bridge?" he asked at length. Wilmington said he sometimes took a hand. "Well, then, you'd better go to the First Field Ambulance," said the D.A.D.M.S. happily. "I understand they want a fourth at bridge there."

"All right," said Wilmington; and shook hands with Tony, who never saw him again.

"That's Wilmington," said Quickshaw. "Now *you*." And he led Tony back to Brigade.

CHAPTER IV

THERE

NINE o'clock in the morning in Leigh Ravine, and the sun was only beginning to heat itself up for its intolerable blaze at noon. Leigh Ravine was an inward fold of the Gallipoli cliffs, with a foot-track sliding down its steep valley to an arc of beach and sea. Its two bluffs, infolding towards the track, were of different soils, the northern white, and the southern red; and the white bluff seemed to be nothing but sand and rocks, but the red had mats of coarse scrub and a few stunted firs. Each was veined with winding paths, where the feet of soldiers had trodden their tracks from the summits to the sea. On the northern and sheltered slope were one or two officers' dug-outs—wedge-shaped recesses cut in the tilted earth and roofed over with waterproof ground-sheets.

But it was nine o'clock in the morning now, and all these officers were gone to the trenches: the sea at the bottom murmured up to but one solitary figure. This was a stocky private soldier who was sitting bare-chested on a stone, while he hunted for insects in his grey-back shirt, which he was nursing across his knees. He had a rather long nose of a Roman shape, and a rather long moustache; and by a ruddiness in the one and a touch of grey in the other, and by the many lines—humorous most of them—about his eyes and nostrils and mouth, one knew him to be at least twenty years older than the majority of his companions in arms. He was forty-five perhaps, or even fifty. So far as his legs were visible under the spread shirt they appeared to be too short for his body, and slightly bowed. Frequently he brushed his wrist along his nostrils; and then, with a brush to right and a brush to left, set in order his lank unmilitary moustache. And as he laboured he sang gently. To a familiar hymn tune he sang:

> "Lousy, lousy, lousy; always bally well lousy;
> Lousy in the morning and lousy late at night . . ."

but he would stop the hymn each time he found a victim, that he might crack it between his two thumb-nails and mutter with a relish, "Click!"

He had just begun the humming of a new tune:

> "Scratching for the dear old country,
> Scratching till the blood comes through——"

when a colonel appeared at the summit of the hill, followed by two young officers and an orderly with slung rifle.

"You there!" called the colonel. "Who the devil are you?"

The soldier jumped to his feet and stood at attention, probably forgetting that his wide hairy torso was naked to the waist. One could see for certain now that his legs were short and bandy.

"Awficer's batman, sir." About his prompt answer there was something which could have come only from the pavements of London: it was deferential, and yet the deference was so rapid and obliging as to be oddly related to impudence. There was no grin on his face, but one felt that there was one somewhere behind; one felt that he enjoyed his prompt deference, as a man must enjoy any crisp imitation of the soldiers.

"Well, come and get a new officer's kit from the Western Mule Trench. It's in charge of a bloody Zionist."

"Yussir." He flung his shirt over his head and tightened his shorts with a leather belt which was decorated all round with regimental badges. "Yussir." And he hurried up the hill rather limpingly—for he had a varicose vein, or said he had.

"Come on, *you*," commanded the colonel to the officers behind.

Colonel Tappiter was a tall, heavily-built man, square-jawed and round-headed. Age perhaps fifty. Except for a flitting tenderness in his eyes he would have made an excellent cartoon of a Prussian officer, so truculent was his chin, so square his face and thick his chest: he was hardly brother to the slim grey English colonels.

"Well, Scrase," said he, speaking to the older of the officers. "I suppose you'll show O'Grogan where he can stake out a claim here, but first I'm going to take him to a higher point and show him the bloody landscape. Got a bloody batman

for him?" Colonel Tappiter used the army adjective as easily and as gratuitously as any of his men.

Scrase said that the man who had gone for the kit had been Priestley's servant.

"What's his name?"

"Wylie, sir."

"Looks a scoundrel, but I daresay he isn't."

"He's quite a good fellow, sir."

"H'm. A very slovenly one! Well, he'd better be O'Grogan's servant now. O'Grogan, your predecessor was killed here yesterday. A stray shell. Better inherit all you can from him, including his servant."

"Yes, sir."

Wylie now staggered into view with Tony's valise, and the Colonel called to him:

"You there! What's your name? I've forgotten."

"Wylie, sir."

"You were Mr. Priestley's batman. Is his dug-out any good?"

Wylie cocked up a dirty thumb towards the sky.

"It's gawn up, sir."

"Oh, has it? Well, get a *jeldi* on and make a new one for this officer. . . . And you, O'Grogan, come with me. I want to show you something."

Tony followed his colonel along the Mule Trench. This trench was the main artery for the regiments holding the left of the line. Up it, either borne by mules or man-handled, went all rations, kit and ammunition. It was just wide enough for the mules, led by their swarthy Zionists or their brown, turbanned Indians, to travel in single file; and, even so, the animals, as they turned the traverses, swept with their packs the dust off the trench walls.

Colonel Tappiter walked with soldierly rapidity along it, till he turned sharply through a crevice and climbed on to a high bluff very like the one they had just left. Only it must have abutted farther into the sea, for lo! as one looked to the north, there was the coast-line of Gallipoli stretching away in a chain of bays and headlands. Softened by the distance and the morning haze, they appeared to be gentle headlands with low broken cliffs. Only at one place did they rear up to a conical point.

"Look," said the Colonel, pointing far up the coast-line;

"there's the most interesting part of the Peninsula now. Yes . . ." he stopped, and his jaw came forward as he wondered how the devil to explain why it was interesting.

Tony, looking up at him for the explanation, spent the pause in trying to read the character of his Colonel. Anyone who used "bloody" so often must be pretty inarticulate, and Colonel Tappiter was probably as inarticulate as most; but there was something in the way he stared towards the distant headlands, and something in the troubled expression of his face as he waited for words, that made Tony suspect a powerful charge of romance in the man, which would probably burst out in spluttering sometimes—and was probably going to burst out now.

"Yes," continued the Colonel, "that first headland is Gaba Tepe, and Anzac is just behind it. The next bay is Suvla, where we made our second landing the other day—and made a hell of a mess of it, too. We joined up with the Australians and tried to outflank the Turks who are holding us here. As you perceive, they are still holding us here. Well, dammit, we've got to do something about it—you see. This show's *got* to be won."

He looked at Tony as if expecting his endorsement, so Tony gave it. "Yes, sir."

"Yes . . . this show's the solution of the whole war; you realize that, don't you?"

Here Tony could be enthusiastic. "By jove, yes, sir! I always have."

"Splendid. Well . . . well, there's one thing I always like to say to young officers when they come to me. It's—er—it's this: you see, *you* don't matter. . . . Damn, no! it's the show that matters, isn't it? You may have hell's own life here, before you've done. I hope you will; because, I mean, I hope we shall make a huge drive soon. But even when you're not attacking, you'll have to put up with a lot—heat and flies and lice and bad water, and devil a rest from shell-fire anywhere, but—er—er—I want you to do this: whenever you start to feel sorry for yourself, I want you to say, 'What the devil do *I* matter compared with the—er—the show?' . . . I don't know if you are getting me, but what I mean is, I never knew anyone make a pukka soldier and fight his damnedest as long as he thought himself and his views of some importance. D'you see?"

" Yes, sir, I think so."

" I'm saying all this because Scrase, your Acting Company Commander, though a good enough officer and a thoroughly sound fellow—an excellent fellow, in fact—but he's one of those bloody intellectuals who are fond of arguing against the war. Well, all I can say is, he should have thought of all that before he signed on. What I mean is, a soldier's got to leave all that intellectualism at home—or, rather, kind of sacrifice it along with all the rest of him. As I see it, once our intellects tell us we've got to offer ourselves to our country, well, by God, that's *that !* and we offer the whole damned outfit of us, lock, stock, and barrel—intellect as well as the rest. When the job's done, if we're still there, we can think about thinking again, and tell everybody that it was a damn sight worse than we expected, but—er—not before."

Tony did not answer.

" Eh, isn't that right ? " asked the Colonel sharply.

" Yes, sir," Tony smiled. " I suppose so."

" Of course it is ! You start thinking about anything, except how to get on with the job, and you'll start going to pieces as a soldier. You've decided that it's a decent job, or you wouldn't be here. Well, no more thinking about it—except, of course, about—er—about how absolutely thrilling much of it is. Why, look, my boy "—the Colonel's voice had become quite kind, and his eyes lit up with enthusiasm—" see that island towering up into the clouds there ? That's Samothrace—and that's Imbros—and this is the Aegean Sea where the Greek ships were parked during the Siege of Troy. Why, Troy itself is only just the other side of the Straits . . . God ! Pretty wonderful, isn't it ?—to be fighting where Achilles fought and—and all that sort of thing ? "

" By jove, yes ! " exclaimed Tony.

" Yes . . . well, I must be off to the trenches now. . . . Damn ! it's a quarter to bloody ten already."

He went, smartly as a soldier of the stage ; and his orderly followed him with slung rifle, far less eagerly. Tony returned to the ravine and found his new servant Private Wylie seated comfortably on the rolled-up valise. Wylie sprang to his feet and offered an explanation.

" I didn't think as I'd start on yer dug-out till you'd chosen the site, yer see. Nah, sir, where would you like yer 'ome, and I'll get a move on abaht it ? "

"Well, what do you make a dug-out with?" asked Tony.

"Oh, they give us a shovel, sir, and the Peninsula; and between the two we do something." He bent over the valise and began to unpack it. "Got a ground-sheet, sir?"

"Yes, it's at the bottom. Do we use it for the floor or the roof?"

Wylie came erect again, and scratched his head. "Well, sir, it's not a bad idea to have more than one, sir. Most awficers do."

"But I was told we were only allowed one each."

"Wurl . . . there's that, o' course. Yuss, they do *say* so, sir—but——"

Tony understood and smiled. "Well, where do we get them from? From the Quartermaster?"

"No, sir," said Wylie. He was quite clear on this point; and turning away from it, sent a contemplative gaze towards Imbros. "Nah; not from the Quartermaster hisself, sir. . . . But we get 'em from his Dump."

"Oh, I see." Tony smiled again.

"Yussir. And if I might say so, sir, a few sandbags wouldn't come amiss."

"Will he give us some?"

"No, sir . . . not *give* . . . but I dessay I could put me hands on a few while I'm getting the shovel and the grahnd-sheets."

"All right, then. Had you better go now?"

"No; I'll jest unpack a few things first"—and, running the back of his hand and forefinger beneath his long nose as a brisk preparation, he bent to the valise again. "Pity, sir, the C.O. told us to git started on the dug-out *now*. Not a good time this."

"Why?"

"*Wurl*, it's not a good time for getting together a few things. Their dinner time's better—the Dump wallahs, I mean. And o' course night time's better still. But I expect I shell be able to lift most o' what we want. I got a pal on the Dump . . . *Chrimes!*——" There had been a whine from the Turkish lines and a far away detonation. "Gaw! That's Achi Baba potting at the beaches. This is their Morning Hate, sir. Better sit dahn. Not that we're in much danger here, sir, but things git flying abaht . . . yuss, it's jest about this time they has their Morning Hate."

"Is it bad?"

"Nah!" There was a sorrowful contempt in the word. "'Taint what it used to be, sir. It's never nothin' to write 'ome about now. Jest a friendly hate."

The whines from Achi Baba came quick and fast.

"If they go on like that, sir, they'll have the Navy aht." Wylie turned sharply, enthusiastically, towards Tony. "It proper does me good, sir, to see the Navy come and do the friendly by us. Directly we're being strafed, you look at Imbros over there and you'll see a brace o' bloody little destroyers—beg pardon, sir—a couple of destroyers, or a monitor, come out and lie there and give 'em Gawd-help-us. Bit of all right it is. Joo remember, sir, how Sir Iron Hamilton in his dispatch said that the Navy was Father and Mother to the Army in this show?"

"Yes," nodded Tony.

"Yussir. Well, I'm jest about getting what he meant. When the Navy come along it always reminds me of when I was a nipper and the other fellers were a-hittin' of me, and out comes my Ma and 'ollers, 'Ere! You give over! You leave the little feller be!' It was jest like the Navy now, sir."

"But," Tony protested with a frown, "if the Navy can silence their guns, why don't we get a move on towards Constantinople?"

"Well, it's like this here, sir." Wylie had become immensely confidential, and no doubt enjoyed being the man of long experience talking to a new-comer. He extended his closed fist, pulled his sleeve a long way up his forearm, and pointed to fist and forearm. "That there's the Gallipoli Peninsula; it really is jest abaht its shape." He pointed to the ridge of his knuckles. "That there's Achi Baba; and we can no more git up that little hill with the men we've got on Helles than we can bust through it. Sir Iron Hamilton's known that ever since our attacks last June. Right. Nah then, what did we do?" He pointed to a spot behind his wrist. "Here was the Australians 'eld up in Anzac, so we landed six whole divisions at Suvla alongside o' them and tried to take Achi Baba in the rear. But, bless yer, there was another hill in the way there, called Sari Bair. It isn't here on my wrist, but it was bloody well *there* all right!" He cocked a thumb vaguely in the direction of Suvla Bay.

"I saw it just now," said Tony.

"Yussir, it's still there. Gaw!"—and Wylie laughed in a rich appreciation of his joke—"it's still there all right. We didn't manage to collar it in that surprise attack, and we can never do it now."

"But then what's going to happen?"

He winked. "They do say, sir, that there's ten new divisions coming from England, with Kitchener hisself; and it wouldn't surprise me neither——"

At that moment a shell whistled over from the sea. Wylie jumped up with delight. "Gar! That's the Navy, sir! See that little monitor? There it is! Jest under the hills of Imbros. *She'll* talk to 'em all right. Gaw! Doesn't it proper do you good, sir? . . ." They watched the little monitor spurting her flame, and listened to her shells roaring above them, like express trains over a bridge; and then suddenly Wylie touched Tony on the sleeve.

"Johnny Turk's stopped—joo notice, sir? He's 'ad enough. But the Navy'll keep on a bit longer—she likes to give 'im more than enough—so I'll be nipping awf to snaffle them few things now; yes, sir, I'll do it now, while the Navy's putting up this nice little covering fire for us. Shan't be gawn above an hour." He brushed his forefinger along his nose and down both wings of his moustache, and walked off quickly, on his bowed and stocky legs.

Tony stood quite alone in the little ravine, with the sea murmuring up to him from the beach below. Overhead, at intervals, the shells from the monitor roared; and the sun watched, blazing but unperturbed. He resolved to climb higher that he might see the shells bursting on Achi Baba. He went nervously—step by step, with his head ready to duck—for he suspected that he might be doing a dangerous thing. But no one on the land, or on the water, seemed to have any interest in him; and soon he found himself on the bluff's highest point, and standing erect. There in front of him, though seen sideways, lay the whole length of the plateau, very narrow and curving upwards to the flank of Achi Baba. Behind it, across the Straits of the Narrows which he could not see, rose the hills of Asia, and of Troy. The plateau was carpeted with patches of scrub, and furnished here and there with ruined vineyards or dusty olive groves. A little way up the flank of he hill the trenches of the British wormed and wriggled and

twisted ; and above them, in a brave and merciless parallel, ran the trenches of the Turks. And just now that flank of Achi Baba was belching balls of yellow and black smoke where it received, and resisted unshaken, the shells of the Navy.

Excitement swelled in him, and was none the worse for the residue of melancholy that lay beneath it. Here he was. He had put thousands of miles between him and his cottage home under the Sussex Downs ; and here he was, standing under Achi Baba, at the end of his voyage. He could get no further ; those trenches saw to that. What wonderful things he would have to write to Honor. And to Peggy, who would read it all out to his mother. And to old Keatings and Derek in France. Surely France was dull compared with this. No Samothrace to the left of it, and Troy to the right ! By heavens, let him get this dug-out finished, and he would sit down on its floor and write to them all.

This land—this tongue of land on which he stood, with the Aegean, a broad mirror, behind him ; and in front, though he could not see it, the narrow tide of the Hellespont, under the hill ! Over the Hellespont was Abydos, where Xerxes, after he had built his bridges across the Strait, sat on his marble throne and reviewed his triremes on the water and the vast assembly of Persia on the land, before it crossed to Europe, with garlands and with banners, with foot-soldiers and with horsemen, with sacred animals and stream of sumpter beasts, to attempt the overthrow of Athens and the Grecian power. And Xerxes wept (so said old Herodotus, and so had Tony with heating cheeks taught many a time to his boys at Stratton Lye), and he spake thus to Artabanus : " There came upon me a pity as I thought of the shortness of men's lives, and how of all this mighty host none would be alive one day." Then Xerxes crossed over on to the peninsula of Gallipoli with his army numbering a million, and there met him a man of the place who asked, " Wherefore needed Zeus to come in your person, bringing all the world with him, to destroy Greece ? " And Xerxes went on to Thermopylae and Salamis.

Tony wandered down again into Leigh Ravine, and waited for Wylie, who returned in due time with a grin on his face, and two bales of sandbags and several ground-sheets under one arm, and two beams of wood under the other, and a pick and two shovels in his hands. " I jest brought a few things that might be useful," he said. He plumped them down, and

brushed his wrist along his mottled Roman nose, and smoothed both sides of his moustache.

"The dug-out can be anywhere we like?" asked Tony taking a spade.

"Yussir. The land's all free here."

"It's only leasehold though," laughed Tony.

"What, sir?"

"The landlord may turn us out," Tony amended.

"Yeh, he tries it on now and again," Wylie admitted. "Yeh, he's a nasty customer sometimes, but I've known worse."

Tony had driven his spade into the soft ground. He threw up a spit of earth and another and another; then paused, and lifted his helmet to wipe the sweat from his forehead. Great blue flies buzzed round the moisture and alighted on his eyelids and his lips to drink it; their humming was the only sound in his ears; all murmur of guns had ceased. He returned to his digging, and the sweat dropped from the lining of his helmet into his future home.

CHAPTER V

MANY FRIENDS AND AN ENEMY

TONY had arrived, but he had arrived at what? At a six-mile stretch of stagnation; that was all. Nothing was happening on Gallipoli. Nothing, that is to say, except the sunrays carrying heat-stroke, and the dust and the flies carrying dysentery; and the lice and the lizards and the centipedes and the mantis dwelling in lively cohabitation with both armies; and Achi Baba hurling American shells at the British, many of which, most fortunately refused to burst; and the British eighteen-pounders and the French seventy-fives hurling back shells into the face of Achi Baba; and always a policeman's rattle of rapid-fire along the whole line at sundown. There was no other military movement; only the relief of units in the line, and the arrival of reinforcement drafts, and the endless evacuation of emaciated men whose strength had gone out of their bodies down the cataracts of dysentery. And, day by day, the burial of the dead. It was all the simple effect of a simple cause. The High Authorities at home had quarrelled over the Dardanelles campaign, and one man was huffed with another; so they did nothing about it, but fixed their attention on France; and an army stayed rotting on Gallipoli.

During those months of stagnation one of that army, Antony O'Grogan, made many friends. There was Kit Scrase, temporarily in command of C Company. Tony liked Scrase from the first, and grew to like him more and more; grew even to wonder in his hidden thoughts whether Kit might not be to him what old Raking had never been and what Frank Doyly might have been if their roads had not turned apart. Scrase was a fair-haired Saxon of much the same age as himself, and much the same height, though wider in the shoulders and

handsomer in the face; and he loved an abstract argument even more than Tony. Together they would argue for hours about the rights and wrongs of war, its beauty and its ugliness. Yes, they argued thus, despite the self-denying ordinance recommended by Colonel Tappiter; for none could have resisted Scrase, once he had lit up his pipe and dropped a few intolerably provocative statements, and was manifestly forcing a grin to keep behind his tightening lips (as the well-bred should), and his eyes were a-twinkle—when, in short, he was in brilliant mood for controversy.

Then would Tony propound, with puzzled brow, a favourite theory that war, despite all its hideousness, was strangely beautiful: he could not explain this strange beauty, he said; he could only see it; he could see it like a lambent light playing over all the tracts of desolation. And by that he didn't mean just the self-sacrifice and the bravery and the good-fellowship, which were obvious things; but he meant a beauty in the sheer Fact of War. Oh, he hardly knew what he meant, but sometimes it seemed to him that war didn't appeal so much to the ape and tiger in men as, dammit all, to the poet in them. At any rate, it fascinated *him;* and he couldn't see that it fascinated the lower elements of him so much as the higher. Why, wasn't this infinitely alluring beauty of war written into the very texture of all languages? All writers, no matter what they were describing, would they not rather employ the military metaphor than any other? Who would write "Voltaire was the intellectual superior of Rousseau" if he could write "Voltaire mounted the heavier intellectual guns"? Who would leave the sentence "The old religions were gradually displaced by Christianity" had he thought of "One by one the old gods went down before the advancing artillery of Christ"? When Tolstoy planned a novel that should surpass all others, to what did he look for a subject? The Napoleonic Wars. When Hardy left the domesticities of his Wessex novels and sought to write a great epic, what alone seemed a theme worthy of "The Dynasts"? The same. Here was the dilemma, old man: rationally he loathed the idea of war, but emotionally and æsthetically he gloried in it: now explain that, old man; explain it, please; he wanted to see where he was wrong, if he could.

And Scrase delighted in explaining it—or rather, in controverting it. No, Tono; no, Bungay—Scrase called his

friend alternately Tono and Bungay, without reference or apology to Mr. Wells—no, it wouldn't wash; it was damned bad æsthetics, that: beauty was essentially order, war was disorder, *ergo* war was an offence.

But dash it all, Kit, old man—Tony would become quite lyrical—what about a thunderstorm seen from a height in the Alps, or the collapse of a whole mountain-side of snow under the sun; were these things order? No. And yet who could deny they were beautiful? So when half the nations stood arrayed against half the nations, and all their guns spoke!

Oh, great arguments, on the slopes of Leigh Ravine. And as they argued the sun would go down behind Imbros, and all the world turned purple; and the Turks, fearing the fall of night, would open their famous rapid-fire, which ran along the whole width of the trenches with the sound of a forest in flames, and Tony would jump up and say, "Hell, old man, isn't *that* beautiful? *Course* it is, you blitherer! You've got to leave the human aspect out. Beauty's inhuman sometimes."

Scrase argued brilliantly on the opposite side; but Tony forgot Scrase's arguments because he could not contain them: he always had a sense that Scrase's arguments were intellectual exercises unrelated to his personal feelings; and that therefore his own, bewildered and muddied though they were, were the truer talk. This was not to say that Scrase was hypocritical: it simply meant that in his love of these jolly dialectics he became impersonal. He was fundamentally a straight fellow, with a high sense of duty. He had arrived on the Peninsula with his regiment a few weeks after the great landing of April, and had played a brave part—so the reports said—in all the battles since. None the less, in his year of soldiering he had learnt to hate the war, and to doubt the perfect innocence of any of its belligerents, and to see with clear eyes the dullness of our plain honest generals, and the sharpness of our most specious politicians; and he had the courage to keep his eyes on these disturbing visions and not to let them swing away as the softer eyes of Tony swung; but, despite these doubts, he saw also that he had accepted the responsibilities of an officer and must discharge them to the best of his power.

Scrase was as reticent about his emotions as he was demonstrative about his thoughts. Not in all the time they were together did he tell by an overt word his affection for Tony; he would have been quite incapable of doing so. But the

affection was there: and it peeped out in the confidences which, as the friendship deepened, he would give to Tony. To him and to none else he would talk of his father, Alderman Scrase of Thamesmouth, a dear, good, simple Tory whose fire-eating pronouncements, these days, so chafed his only son; and of his mother who, being one of the gentlest souls alive, was the echo of her husband, and therefore would never, never understand the thoughts that stirred in Kit. "I don't argue at home," he said; "it's no good hurting them, so perhaps that's why I work it off here." And Tony, in return, would speak to him, as to none else, about the secrets of his family: about his father who had deserted them, and about Keatings, his cynical brother, and Derek, his pompous brother; about Peggy, his favourite sister, and—aye, he went so far as this—about Honor and the failure of his love for her, and its resurgence now that he had her no more. "You know, when all's said and done, old man, there's only one woman in your life who really matters," said he, quoting Hughes Anson without acknowledgment. Scrase nodded over this, and said nothing, with great respect.

That was Kit Scrase. In his clear fearless vision he reminded Tony of Hughes Anson—who, thank Heaven, was again a near neighbour in the trenches held by A Company—but he was different from The Roseate Hughes in this, that while he doubted the virtue of killing Turks, he did it from a sense of duty, whereas Rosy had no doubt about the viciousness of killing Turks but did it from a sense of sin—or so at least he said.

Then there were Hedges and Vaughan, the other subalterns of C Company; pleasant fellows whom Tony liked well, but they had not the vividness of Scrase; and as Hedges died quickly and Vaughan, drained of all but the dregs of life by his dysentery, staggered off the Peninsula one day, a skeleton in an envelope of yellow skin, they fill no place in Tony's story. Only Kit Scrase remained for a very long while: remained till his terrible end.

Then there was Joe Wylie.

"You've inherited a jewel of a batman in Joe Wylie," said Scrase. "Joe's a slovenly bird, of course. When he first came to the Company we decided that he was too dirty for a smart platoon, so we made him a cook."

"Naturally," Tony agreed.

"Quite. Absolutely. And it suited him all right; he's a bit of an 'old soldier,' who doesn't believe in hard work or danger if he can dodge it—but he has one virtue that's worth most of the others put together."

"What's that, old man?"

"Well—his immense goodwill towards everybody. I don't suppose he's conscious of it, but that's what makes old Joe what he is. He can't pass anybody without cracking a joke at him, and when the men are done-to-the-wide on the march, and are talking murder and mutiny, he brings 'em back to their natural humour by spinning some abominable yarn —probably an obscene one. They say that he used to play a cornet at public-house doors before the war, and tell lewd stories for a living; and now he devotes these notable arts to the service of his country. It's good service, too. You'll see what I mean before you're much older."

Tony saw something of it fairly soon. When he chose the lesser of the two diseases rife on Gallipoli, and went down with "acute catarrhal jaundice" and lay supine in his dug-out, yellow-eyed and atrabiliar, and when the food that Wylie brought him sent his face to the wall, and the taste of the chlorinated water overturned his stomach, then did Joe Wylie try to cheer him by spreading a grin under his moustache, and giving one brush to his long nostrils with the back of his palm, and beginning: "Well now, sir, did I ever tell you this one, sir?" and there followed a rehearsal of some comic incident of his soldiering, Wylie guffawing loudly at the conclusion of the story, and Tony sadly smiling. Once Wylie told him of how he came to enlist on the 6th of August, 1914. "It was like this here, sir. I was aht playing me cornet, and in them days, between you and me, sir, you could make a tidy penny aht of a cornet, what with 'Land of 'Ope and Glory' and ''Arts of Oak' and the people that patriotic—well, sir, I was knocked right awf me tune by a band passing, and law-luvyer! it were our Royal West Essex being marched to the Drill Hall, with all the people following and keeping in step with the band, like they do, sir; and I walked along too, you bet; and I see young Mr. Scrase, Alderman Scrase's son, and Mr. Upperton, our auctioneer; and there in the ranks I see Bill 'Oxton, and Fred Roberts with young Dicky his brother, and Dave Piper (what was killed the other day), and gaw! if I'd bin a year or two younger I'd 'ave gawn and listed there and then. It was

difficult to see all the boys going awf, and not to want to be along of 'em. So I went to a pub to get a half of bitter, and there was Tib—that's my missus—having a half of staht too, to celebrate the beginning of the war. I told her as I'd only jest stopped meself going for a soldier, and Tib says, 'Now down talk so silly, Jow. You're forty-five and you know it.' So I says, 'Am I, my gal? I'm not so sure. I ain't bin sure of it all day. A man's as old as he feels, and I feel about sixteen to-dye. Blimey!' I said, 'there was old Eddie Bancock sweatin' along in his file with his chest slipping down into his flies: *he's* forty-three, I'll lay me 'at on it; and I'd like to be along of old Eddie.' But the Missus only says, 'Nah, Jow, down be silly! you're spoiling me day.' Well, there was a lahsy swine of a pacifist in the pub, called Steve Ablett, and we got arguing, and I says to him, 'Look here, cocky, I dare say what you says is all right, and this here Asquith's probably no better than he should be, and Sedward Grey's nothing to us, and I don't see as the blooming British Empire's ever done us fellers any good, but if a lousy Kayser tries to 'it it 'ard, then I'm for 'eavin' a brick at him along o' the others. Can't 'elp it,' I said. 'It's me nature.' '*E* said it was a school kid's nature; and that fair got me rag out. He was one of those long weedy celery-stick sort of fellers, sir; rather like a clothes line 'angin' dahnwards with a pair of boots swingin' on the end—as I told 'im. A pacifist—pooh! Did-jever see a pacifist that was more than twenty-five rahnd the chest, sir?"

"Oh, yes, Joe. Sometimes," Tony protested.

"Well, *I* never, sir. These pacifists are only pacifists because they don't want the recruiting sergeants to see their chests. And I told 'im so; I told 'im straight; I said, 'Gahn! with a pigeon-breast like yours you daren't have a war!'"

"Did you, Joe?" laughed Tony. "That was 'coming it strong'!"

"Yes, I did; and he says, 'Fat lot you'll do in the war beyond talk!' And I says, 'Oh, and is that so?'"—Wylie acted this dialogue with magnificent gusto; he made a comedy duo of it, in which you could see the weedy Steve and the stocky Joe firing back-chat at each other—"'We'll see about that,' I says. And he says, 'You're going to enlist, I suppose?' And I says, 'No more wouldn't that surprise me neither! So there!' And he says, 'Gow on! you'll talk big, but you

wouldn't join up,' and I says, 'Course I would, you perishin' traitor! If old Eddie Bancock would, wouldn't I?' And Tib, who was standing at me side, says, 'Course he would if he wanted to. Nah then!'"

"Good old Tib!" interrupted Tony.

"Yussir; and well, then, Steve wanted to make out that I could safely brag because they wouldn't have me at forty-five——"

"Did he? That was 'coming it dirty,' wasn't it?"

"Yussir, and I bet 'im they *would* 'ave me, so nah then! So he says, 'Prove it! You aren't doing much to back your words up,' and I says, 'Aren't I?' and he says, 'No.' And I says, 'Then I am, then!' and he says, 'Well, let's see yer do it.' And I says, 'Do it, yersay?' And he says, 'Yes.' And I says, 'Do it, eh?' and he says, '*Yes*, that's what I said.' And I says, 'You dare me to?' and he says, 'I dare you to!' and I says, 'Right, then, you perishin' pro-German; and lemme tell you what'll 'appen to you. You'll be tyken and shot against a wall.' And Tib says, '*Which* I hope he is—devahtly—see?—Yuss!' and would you believe it, sir, I gawn and done it stryte away, I did; and Gawd 'elp us, this is where it's brought me! I never thought of this. Law-lummy, it's comic, it is!"

And at such an absurd conclusion Joe Wylie laughed incontinently, his long finger covering his moustache.

Tony had not been long with the 15th before he believed he had an enemy. Lieutenant Moulden was a sallow man of thirty, with dark, sunken eyes, and a skin too lined for his age. His were the lines of thought, no doubt, but of small, self-seeking thought; they had been graved by petty suspicions and worries and resentments. His voice was pleasant—too pleasant; it had the ingratiating accents of a salesman behind a counter; and, in truth, it was from behind a counter that Moulden had come, and the unhappy memory, to his narrow nature, was a running fount of worry. He was at once the oldest and most junior of the subalterns—another fact to hurt him not a little, though he made very merry about it. His manner was the universal manner of levity, but one felt that it sat ill on his shoulders; that he had donned it, after c

study, as a social dress ; that with Moulden, at any rate, it was unreal, and God was not in it. Let him wear it as he might, an acute eye could see that the real Moulden, withered by his own sensitiveness, was an unhappy creature, lonely and drifting and insecure.

Tony thought him the worst type of "temporary gentleman." There was no shame in having stepped from a hosier's shop into the rank of an officer, but here was one of those fellows who, directly they found themselves hobnobbing as equals with the men whom hitherto they had met only across their deferential counters, must labour to confirm their equality by palpable untruths about their homes, their incomes, and their titled friends. Acutely aware of his difference from young men like Scrase and Hughes Anson, Moulden strove to bury it under these stupid shams and under tones of a great self-confidence.

Why an especial enmity should have arisen between this man and himself Tony was never very clear. Perhaps Moulden disliked him for coming from another division with a month's seniority upon his shoulder-straps ; or because his natural manner with the men was more effective than his own uneasy commands ; or because Colonel Tappiter had pronounced Tony "an acquisition," whereas he was barely polite to Moulden, having early weighed his worth. Tony knew well enough that Moulden lost no opportunity of delicately hinting, under protestations of a considerable liking for "young O'Grogan," that the lad *was* rather inclined to curry favour with the men, and to bumsuck for the Colonel—for, since the Colonel would have little to do with Moulden, he could make a virtue of having little to do with the Colonel.

But, whatever the causes, there had grown up between them one of those dark antipathies that render two men self-conscious in each other's presence and inhibit their talk. Each knew that the other was listening to his every word, and criticizing it and hating it. If Tony found Moulden in dug-out or mess, he sought to escape stealthily, guiltily ; the presence of the man destroyed all his naturalness. If Moulden suddenly encountered Tony, it did not destroy his naturalness, because he had none to destroy, but it rasped him as by an invisible friction. Tony became nervously irritated by the least of Moulden's habitual phrases—by his "I meanter say," and "Yer' see,' and "Well, put it like this" (as if he were striking

a bargain over his counter), and his perpetual "Thet's right!" instead of "yes," and his "really" dropped into every sentence.

Surely "really" could be the insincerest word in the language! "Thet's right, O'Grogan. I agree with you—really. I meanter say: I suppose one can put it like that—really." Oh hell!

He would not have minded these phrases had they not been in such irritating discord with Moulden's pretensions to gentility. Colonel Tappiter could stutter his "I mean" and "I mean to say"—and did, in point of fact, stutter them fifty times in every conversation; but with the Colonel they didn't sound offensive; with Moulden—well, with a vocabulary and an accent like his, fancy pretending to high connexions! And why pretend at all? Here was death waiting for Moulden round every corner, and the fellow could still worry about men's opinion of his social position! What could it matter what men thought of you beneath the shadow of death?

Tony was soon to learn that, to him also, it could matter very much indeed.

Meanwhile his discomfort at Moulden's presence would sicken at times into an irrational fear of him and of his dislike; but he could put no name to his fear.

Tony counted some good friends from among the men of the Company, and the chief of them perhaps were Fred Roberts, Ernest Botten, Willie Sparrow and Jim Stott. He found all these the first morning he entered the fire-trenches; all except Jim Stott. And as he approached the fire-trenches along a communication trench he saw "Percy" for the first time. "Percy" was a brown mummified hand issuing from the tossed-up parapet and pointing a finger towards the Line. Under the Gallipoli sun the dust had powdered away from the shallow counterpane of earth resting upon a body up there, and exposed this hand; but no man now, so Scrase had told him, would cover the hand again, or touch or disturb it in any way, for the superstition had seized the trenches that, as long as that finger pointed forwards, the British army would not go backwards. He stared at it. It was strange to think that this dead soldier—who had been a petty labourer from a shipyard on the Clyde—should have stayed so long on the site of his falling,

covered only with a blanket of earth, and putting his useless right hand to a purpose still.

Tony entered the firing line and walked along it. Difficult to believe that this constricted and smelling ditch was the ultimate end of that vast service of supply which stretched from the docks of Devonport and Southampton to the forty quays of Alexandria; from Alexandria to the crowded harbour of Lemnos; and from Lemnos to the busy beaches of Helles! Was this dirty ditch the climax and justification of all the work that palpitated in England; of the great hospitals of Malta; of all those white hospital ships and black transports and grey warships that were plying in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas; was this tumbled parapet the last word to so proud a sentence?

For Tony it was a moment of realization. Yes, it all wasted away into this drain, just here.

He turned from the realization and walked on. A glance through the periscope of the first man encountered showed him the black sandbags of the Turks' front line. Needless to say, not a Turk was visible; only the reports of their rifles and the explosion of one of their bombs behind our parados assuring him that their trenches were not empty. He went farther, and it seemed to him that every second man was sitting on the fire-step, bare-chested, and hunting in his shirt for lice. In one bay he came upon Fred Roberts, the man with the so typical London face whom he had met yesterday in the Gully carrying sandbags of rations; Fred was having a wrestle with the lock of his rifle, and cursing about as virulently as when he upset his bully-beef tins.

"More trouble, Roberts?" inquired Tony; and Fred Roberts recognized him and stayed his grumbling.

With Fred was his brother Dicky. This Dicky was at least fifteen years younger than Fred, being perhaps twenty-two to the other's thirty-seven; and he had all the high spirits of his youth. Picking at the seams of his shirt, he was singing, "I'm lousy but I'm 'appy . . ." whereat he stopped and grinned at the approaching officer. Fred, being on the whole a man who had quieted under the weight of his forty years, seemed to think he must apologize for the ribaldry of his brother, and explained:

"It's them there Gallipoli cattle, sir."

"Yes," said Tony, and added with the fatuity of one just

out from England, "they're a bit unpleasant, I suppose." He was feeling, to say the truth, uncomfortably shy of these his men.

"*Wurl*, we down mind 'em so much, sir," answered Fred, grinning. "They give us summat to think about."

"How's the hand?" asked Tony, glancing at the bandage round the knuckles of Fred's right hand.

"Ow, it's nothin', sir. It's nothin' to write home about. I can't get to Blighty on that—can't even get to 'awspital. Wish to Gawd I could!"

"Well . . ." the conversation had languished. "I'm glad to find you're in my company. I—I hope we shall see a lot of each other."

"Yessir," said Fred Roberts.

"Well—er—well, good-bye for the present."

"Goo'-bye, sir."

Continuing his passage, Tony came to a three-foot square hole, the entrance of a subterranean sap that led below the enemy's position. He was not going to miss anything, so, all huddled up, and with the aid of a rope, he let himself down the steep decline into the pitch darkness of this attenuated tunnel. Crawling on hands and knees, or slithering along while he sat on his heels, he pursued the course of the gallery, feeling his way by striking both sides with his stick. After he had turned two corners the darkness became absolute—the pure undiluted commodity made on Creation's Day. He pushed on till he surmised that he must be well beneath Turkish territory. His imagination created with horror the sensations of those who were sometimes entombed in these galleries by the explosion of a Turkish counter-mine. On he went, knowing that there were men of his command somewhere in this bowel of earth; and ever and again his crouching back dusted the roof of the gallery. Where were the men? He hoped he would find them, for he was beginning to doubt his ability to trace his way back; there might be cross-roads in the gallery. It stopped his heart to picture himself going round and round, unable to find the way out. As for the men, he feared lest they had been buried alive and it had fallen to him to discover the disaster. Then suddenly he heard a welcome sound. It was a pleasant English voice a little distance away, saying: "I say, Ernie! what's that bloody noise?"

Tony hailed them and explained with blushes (not to be seen,

though hotly felt) that he was a new officer—and extraordinarily foolish his explanation sounded, down there in the blackness.

A good fellow, much relieved to find that the intruder was no Turk, crawled to him with an unlit candle-end and begged for a match. Unfortunately Tony had none to give him, so the man said, "Oh, well, it didn't matter," and led him to where two of them were spending their two-hour shift in a listening-post, which was a little off-shoot from the gallery. This second fellow—or voice, for that was all he was—proved to be a native of Twineham in Sussex, only a stone's-throw from Tony's cottage home in Albourne; and straightway Tony and he forgot their relationship as officer and private and became in the darkness just a gentleman of Sussex and one of its labouring men, who must speak of the South Downs at sunset, and the ring of trees on Chanctonbury Hill, and the noble crown of Wolstonbury brooding over the weald.

Truer, maybe, to say that the officer did the talking, glad to have found a subject so pleasant and fruitful; and that the man's part consisted of, "Aye, zur; reckon I know it well enough," and "Aye, zur, I should know it middlin' well, living along of it twenty year and mower," for Ernie Botten—in all solemnity he had announced that his name was thus—Ernie Botten had the slow-working Sussex brain; one could imagine him staring with a frown at his visitor as the words filtered their meaning into his head, and then experiencing some emotion that must be forever nameless to him. "Sheep's Eye Cottage? Aye, zur, reckon I know Sheep's Eye well enough, zur. It belonged to Mr. Orde of Thatchers Spinney Farm, zur, till they made a gen'l'man's cottage of it, zur."

In that "zur" with which Ernie Botten punctuated every clause of his sentences, Tony heard the essential difference between him and the pert East-enders of Stratford, Barking and Thamesmouth, who made up the majority of the R.W.E.s. The feudal deference of a labourer in the fields of a Home County was still the habit of Ernie Botten. Neither he nor any of his forefathers had ever known, nor would they have understood, the saucy independence that a pavement breeds.

"I must have been living in it when you were in Twineham if you didn't leave till 1914," said Tony.

Ernie Botten thought this out, and discovered in due time that it was indisputable. "Aye, zur; reckon you must. Aye, we musta bin nigh each other if you was there in 1914."

"We may have met before, then," suggested Tony.

This was far from clear to Ernie Botten, who, after considering the proposition at length, submitted, "Well, zur, I can't say about that, zur. I don't rightly know what you're like—not in this darkness."

"Nor I you," laughed Tony. "You must reintroduce yourself to me, up in the light."

"Aye, zur. Ernie Botten's me name."

Assuredly it was not in Ernie to perceive the queerness of this colloquy, but Tony's mind awoke to it for a moment: here they were, talking of beloved scenes, as they sat on the floor of a little appendix in a bowel of earth, thousands of miles away from the landscapes that were filling their minds; each unable to see the other's likeness or guess his age: and the foe above them: and their talk chequered all the while by the muted sound of bomb explosions outside on the surface of the world. He remembered a day—England's last day of peace—when Honor and Peggy and Jill and himself stood on the crown of Wolstonbury and gazed at the vast carpet of the weald below them and thought of the men and women in those tiny villages who were standing at their cottage doors waiting for news . . . and waiting . . . and waiting. And here was he, speaking to one of these men, in such a place! Well, all luck to the fellow! It was good of him to be here.

There was no doubt that a considerable friendship had established itself between Ernie Botten who came from Twineham and this new officer who came from Albourne; and Ernie, if he couldn't express it in words, could at least do so by escorting his friend to a new and better exit from the sap; which he did, taking him to the bottom of a perpendicular shaft up which one hauled oneself along a rope.

As Tony issued from the maw of this well-like shaft, he saw above him a long strip of dazzling sunlight: it was a ribbon of the open sky, shining above the narrow fire-trench.

He passed into the next bay and made another friend. This was a very thin and frail youngster who could not have been more than sixteen years old; and the sickness in his face and body startled Tony. He had the hollow cheeks, the glassy eyes, and the sunken wrists of a consumptive, though the disease which consumed him was probably named, not Tuberculosis, but Gallipoli. The flies played about a sore on his lip. William

Sparrow was his name, and, as Tony learned later, he was known throughout the battalion as "Little Willie."

The presence of so youthful a victim on the Peninsula in the second year of war is quickly explained. The culpability was his own; for when England took to war in 1914, numbers of her immature male children deemed themselves in a state of hostility with Germany and her Allies, and by a little perjury in the Recruiting Offices slipped themselves into the campaigns; and in 1915 the Authorities were only just beginning to weed them out and send them home to their mothers. Tony had met them in Malta and Mudros, waifs under orders for England. The searching fingers of the War Office had not yet reached this far-away desolate ditch, north of Leigh Ravine in Gallipoli; so Tony was able to sit beside Willie Sparrow, aged sixteen, on the fire-step.

The conversation was not five minutes old before the boy produced from his breast-pocket the photographs of his mother and—bless his heart—his girl. The first picture showed the most lovable of old working women, dressed up in her Sunday silks, and beaming as she sat in the ornate studio chair, with a splendid boy in khaki standing at her side. This boy in the photograph was a round-cheeked, sparkling person, full of pride in his new uniform—a plump, well-fed, prize boy. And the mother knew all about it, and had put on her silks to do him no discredit. They were a prize pair, the two of them. Tony complimented the sickly youngster at his side on his mother, and asked him who was the boy in the photograph.

"That's me," said Willie Sparrow.

"Of course it is," answered Tony quickly. "What a fool I am!" But not in outline nor in feature did the haggard youth on the fire-step resemble the blooming boy in the photograph.

"I've got a bit thinner," he volunteered apologetically, as if it was something to be ashamed of. "And I reckon mother's got a bit thinner too, the way she worries over me. I wonder —I wonder, sir, if you'd mind writing and telling her I'm in the pink. Coming from a new officer, it might do the trick."

Tony promised to write that afternoon, and turned the talk into other channels. He quickly discovered that Willie Sparrow was a lad of far greater education and refinement than most of the labourers, general dealers and railway workers who were his comrades in the Royal West Essex. Like Fred

Roberts and his young brother Dicky, he came from Southend, but its evening schools had smoothed his manners and enlarged his meanings, while the quiet of a simple God-fearing home had touched him with its own culture. Willie Sparrow could talk of serious things, and cared to talk of them; and Tony perceived that it was no small relief to this sick and languishing child, whose thoughts had long been stored away from the hearing of his crude companions, to have found such a sympathetic listener as himself; and he stayed talking with him for a long time. As he rose to go, the top of his helmet must have shown above the parapet, for *smack* went a Turkish rifle and the bullet zipped into the parados. To his surprise the boy, who, sitting on the step, was in perfect safety, ducked and cowered.

"He can see you, sir," he said.

"Yes, but he can't see *you*. There's no need for you to duck."

"Sorry, sir," he replied. "I can't help it. I've seen several killed by showing their heads above the parapet, and it shakes me up. It's an awful thing to have man after man killed beside you. Seems you must be the next yourself. My best chum was shot just like that, and he fell on top of me, knocking me down. It—it rather broke my nerve."

It was the simple truth. His face was white like the face of one who had suddenly snapped a limb; his eyes were those of a frightened stag.

The bay was empty except for these two, so Tony said gently:

"The fact of the matter is, son, that you're not at all well."

And at that Willie Sparrow broke down. Sudden sympathy in an emotional moment had rushed the tears up to his eyes. He became a child of ten years old, and sobbed, "I don't want to be a coward, sir . . . I don't want to be a coward. . . ." Tony talked with him a little longer, till he should be at ease again; then went his way. And as he turned round the traverse Willie Sparrow called after him: "You won't forget that letter, sir, will you? Tell her I'm in the pink."

One night, after a day whose heat stuck the clothes to one's body with sweat, it turned astonishingly cold. The officers in Leigh Ravine, unable to keep warm in their little mess, went

to their dug-outs and hurried, half-clothed, into their "flea-bags" and laced up their valises over them. Scrase, anxious to continue a most enjoyable and brightly effulgent argument with Tony, brought his valise to the new dug-out, and the two talked beneath their crowding blankets. Leigh Ravine was quiet under the stars; and the Aegean Sea, far below, lay still as a mountain lake.

A little way down the bluff the officers' batmen, in a glimmering dug-out, were singing hymns. They were the same men who earlier in the evening had been yelling about the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond, and that "in the lilt of Irish laughter you could hear the angels sing;"—and who, between verses, had been prodigal with their oaths. They chanted their Hymn of Boredom:

> "When this weary war is over,
> Oh how happy I shall be;
> When I get my city clothes on,
> No more soldiering for me;"

they had greeted, loudly laughing, the close of the Turkish rapid-fire with "When you come to the end of a perfect day;" and now with much feeling—indeed, with exaggerated expression—they sang very softly the hymns of home.

Scrase and Tony forgot their argument and listened. Four of the batmen were singing in unison, but one voice was improvising harmonies. This was the fresh young voice of "Little Willie" Sparrow, who had been a choir-boy all his life. He was here, because Scrase had transferred him, on Tony's mediation, from the trenches to the easier life of an Officer's Servant. A second voice, too, would sometimes separate itself from the others, and wander about in a distinguished loneliness—Joe Wylie's: now it was humorously loud, now humorously soft, and anon it trembled up the ravine in an appalling vibrato. Then for a period it would stop, while he accompanied the hymn on a mouth-organ.

> "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
> Lead Thou me on. . . ."

Striving after effect, the men sang it very slowly indeed; and the two officers, wrapped in their blankets, smoked and listened. Once Tony took his pipe from his mouth, and, knocking it out on his revolver, said something to his companion.

"Shut up, Bungay," Scrase replied tersely. "I want to listen."

Now the men were singing, "God be with you till we meet again," and singing it with a studied sadness, as if they were determined to make themselves thoroughly homesick; and after an interval during which, in the quiet of the night, you could hear the leaves of a hymn-book turning, they burst into:

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light. . . ."

"It touches one up, doesn't it?" murmured Tony.

"Shut up!" interrupted Scrase, and they listened again.

"Forgive me, Lord, for Thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done. . . ."

Tony longed for it to go on, and wished it would stop. Old Sunday evenings in his father's church; old days at school when a hymn was sung before they went home; old holidays at Freshwater Bay when he and Peggy and Keatings and Derek would listen to the long-haired Evangelist, Captain Alum, singing his hymns on Tennyson Down—these memories were with him now. In his dug-out in Leigh Ravine he was so high up and so far removed from the people and the places associated with these melodies; and they made him feel even higher and farther.

"Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed. . . ."

He rose and found his way down to the dug-out which held the little choir. He saw five men lolling on the earth around a candle stuck upon a salmon tin. Joe Wylie, heavily blanketed, was blowing spittle out of his mouth-organ; Art Webster, Moulden's batman, was holding the khaki hymn-book in a mittened hand; Willie Sparrow lay on his stomach that he might read over Webster's shoulder; and two others, reclining on their backs, awaited the instructions of the choir-master. When Tony complimented them on their singing they apologized for its poorness on the grounds that there was only one hymn-book between them; and Wylie said, "Joo like it, sir? Gawd! I thought it was keeping 'em awake—the gen'l'men lodgers upstairs."

" Not at all," said Tony rather foolishly, " not at all."

" Why, I told Art Webster his voice'd get him fourteen days' C.B. Now, Willie Sparrer, 'e knows all abaht it. Art *thinks* he does, but there's his voice, you see—it must be 'ard on you awficers, sir."

" Oh no. We're enjoying it."

" Oh well then, sir ; if you like it, we'll gie you some more. Come on, Art."

Tony walked back to his lofty nest, and was quickly in his blankets ; while the men, much encouraged and glad to please, appeared to have undertaken the task of singing every hymn in the book. Tony and Scrase could hear them quarrelling as to which they should sing next, or the voice of Art Webster crying, " Here's one we ain't 'ad yet ! "

They must have sung fifty hymns before their candle went out.

Scrase spoke no more to Tony, nor Tony to Scrase, but their eyes were still open. And suddenly a searchlight from the sea played over their hill-slope, lighting for a second the inside of their dug-out.

" Hullo ! " exclaimed Tony. " Did you see that ? "

" Yes," said Scrase. " The Navy."

Tony was stirred. " The jolly old Navy keeping watch ! "

" Yes, Father and Mother to the Army," mused Scrase.

Tony sat up and peered out to sea ; but in the darkness he could find no watching ship : he saw only the smooth Aegean, and, across it, the shapes of the Imbros hills, a thought darker than the starry sky. He sat there for some time ; and suddenly the searchlight played over the bluffs of Leigh Ravine again. It lit the silent dug-out where the men who had been singing were now asleep ; and it lit Tony's face.

" Scrase ! " he muttered. " Scrase, are you asleep ? "

There was no answer.

He composed himself to rest ; but before he slept, he knew that the searchlight had swept over the tired army a third time.

CHAPTER VI

PADRE QUICKSHAW

AND still nothing happened on the Peninsula; so that even Colonel Tappiter, who had persisted in his gallant confidence that the halt was only temporary and the Authorities must be going to drive on with so brilliant a conception as Gallipoli, began to sadden with thought. Usually he kept his thoughts to himself, but now and again they fermented in him, and he fumed. He would pause in his tour of the trenches and, being a big man, would stand a-tiptoe to lift his spectacled eyes above the parapet and have a look at Achi Baba rising so gently behind the Turkish lines; and he would mutter, "We could do it, Scrase, we could do it! An ounce of resolution at home, and we could do it. . . . This damned shilly-shallying. . . . Let 'em make up their minds (if they've got any to make up) and send us pukka support, and, by God, we'd do it for 'em! Why they can't be content to hold the Germans in France while they ship every man they can spare out here, where we've a chance of polishing up the war for 'em—but not they! Talk and gas. . . . Talk and gas. . . . Because we've been biffed at Helles and biffed at Suvla, is that any reason for not going on? If it is, then it's some new way of fighting that I don't understand. Why the devil isn't that fellow wearing his helmet? This battalion's a bloody disgrace—more like a collection of toughs and footpads than a regiment of soldiers. I'll make them know they've got to be soldiers." And he fumed unreasonably when his Adjutant reported that G.S.O.1 and D.A.D.M.S. were fishing in a boat off Gully Beach jetty by the simple process of throwing bombs into the Aegean and picking up the dead fish as they rose to the surface. "*Poof!* I should have thought they'd have found something better to do," said he, "than to waste bombs on fish that were meant for the Turks. But all they care about is their bellies." And when news filtered down the ravines, one October morning,

that Sir Ian Hamilton had been recalled to London and a new Commander was on his way; and when, all along its route, this story lifted eyebrows and drew grimaces, and officers whispered the word "evacuation," then did Colonel Tappiter heat with dissent. He would have no truck with such a word; at a breath of it he scattered his "bloodies" like rose petals about the Peninsula. "Oh no! Bloody well no! . . . No, dammit, I daren't think that. We can't be going to throw up this show. . . . No, I believe it means that we're going to make another terrific attempt. Yes, that's what it means." And he was like a schoolboy, justified and triumphant, when he read in a Special Order of the Day the last words of their high-hearted commander: "Sir Ian Hamilton thanks all ranks for the wonderful way they have seconded his efforts to lead them towards that decisive victory which, under their new chief, he has the most implicit confidence they will achieve." "There you are!" cried Colonel Tappiter, tearing off his spectacles, as the mess accorded to these words the tribute of silence. "I told you so! No talk of evacuation there! No, it means a great forward movement at last!"

But did he believe it in his heart of hearts? It was immediately after this that Stephenson of B Company was killed in a traverse just in front of the Colonel and Scrase; a bomb splinter had found his head, and they hurried forward and saw his brains on the trench floor. The Colonel, turning towards Scrase, saw that he was shaken, for Stephenson had been a great friend of his. "Damn, man, there's nothing to be shaken about," he snapped angrily. "What did you expect? . . . Little thing like that! . . . Don't stand there staring, you fools. Get the stretcher-bearers. Come on, Scrase: we shall probably be done in ourselves sooner or later, and what do our potty little lives matter compared with——" but he didn't continue: there was no doubt that he was reciting with less conviction than usual his favourite maxim by which he sought to keep himself a good soldier and his men good soldiers too. In the old days when they had been hammering a way to victory, every word of it had been potent for him; but now, when they were sitting about idly and playing with words like "retreat" and "evacuation," it had lost a little of its virtue.

We are not concerned to show whether Colonel Tappiter was wrong or right in his estimate of Gallipoli, but to say only that here was a man who believed in the campaign with all his

heart and soul; a man whose brain was daylight clear so long as he was leading his men forward, but fogged over at a breath of the word "retire." There was a day when the little news-sheet, *The Peninsula Press*, printed a passionate utterance delivered by Mr. Churchill in the Parliament at home; and Colonel Tappiter read it once; then waved it above his head and read it aloud. "Listen to this, you fellows: 'If there were any operations in the history of the world which, having been begun, it was worth while to carry through with the utmost vigour and fury, with a consistent flow of reinforcements, and an utter disregard of life, it was the operations so daringly and brilliantly begun in the immortal landing of April 25th.' There!" Excited with approval, Colonel Tappiter tore off his spectacles and drummed his knuckles on the paper joyfully. "That's it! That's it absolutely! That's what I've always bloody well said, only this fellow expresses it better. By jove, they know how to talk, these fellows!" And he got up and carried his large, heavy, but erect frame to the window, where he looked out thoughtfully at the stillness over the scrub and the sea.

During the stagnation there was one very active person on this western edge of the Peninsula: Padre Quickshaw. Hardly ever did Tony walk over the plateau, or down the Gully Ravine, but he met sooner or later that queer little figure with the permanent indignation sparking in his eyes and the pungent exasperation spurting from his lips. One morning Tony was sent down the Gully with an oral message to a battery commander in Geogheghan's Bluff. Now, if one continued to think of the Gully Ravine as a Titan's trench, then Geogheghan's Bluff was a shell-blown landslide in one of its walls, which, having fallen, made a sheltered amphitheatre where hundreds of dug-outs might be cut. In the floor of this amphitheatre was a tiny wired cemetery, and here Tony saw a parade of gunners round an open grave, and an unmistakable figure at the grave's head—Padre Quickshaw, with a short crumpled surplice hanging awry on his shoulders, a purple stole over the surplice, a khaki collar appearing incongruously above, and a pith helmet crowning all. High up on a shelf in the Gully wall a battery was firing steadily at Achi Baba, and its shells flew with a roar over the little funeral service, unconsciously providing the

salute. Very fitting that an artilleryman should have the guns for his firing party! And their salute was not "three rounds blank," but three hundred live shells directed at the enemy, as if in vengeance. Tony went up and stood by the congregation. So loudly and persistently did the guns bark that Padre Quickshaw, without hope of being heard, had resigned himself to mumbling beneath this baldachin of noise: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God——": it was almost as though the guns were fretfully asserting that their dark business of retribution was more urgent than this womanish business of mourning and prayer. The Burial Office completed, the parade was marched away, and Quickshaw, at Tony's request, conducted him to his destination, for this padre probably knew his way about the Peninsula better than most men. And all the time the battery in the cliff continued to fire over the new grave: other men might finish so quickly, but they had not done with the story yet.

Another morning—this was when the rains had come—Tony clambered out of the Western Mule Trench on to the plateau, resolved to continue his journey in the open, let the distant Turks see him or not. He had sickened of dragging his boots out of the glutinous yellow mud that filled the bottom of the trench. Arrived on the plateau, he discovered that he was standing upon the very "Deserted Battlefield" of his dreams. It was a wild flat table-top stretching to the brink of a perpendicular cliff whose foot was lapped by the sea. Among the patches of scrub that covered it; among the rusty shell-cases, the shrapnel bullets, and the discarded small-arm ammunition; among the ruined coils of barbed wire lay the skeletons of soldiers in their rotting clothes. From more than one skeleton the skull had rolled some yards away. Two at least of those near Tony, if he could judge by their bottle-green uniforms, were Turkish officers. He stood erect and looked about him. At the cliff end of this desolate flat was a group of men, moving against the sky; and one of them was a short childish figure who—yes, a nearer view confirmed the impression—was wearing a violet stole over his khaki jacket. Tony drew close. It was Padre Quickshaw addressing himself, with the aid of a Burial Party of the 15th, to the cleaning up of the Peninsula. The men were going with their spades from skeleton to skeleton and digging for each a rude grave, in which they laid him, and pushed back the earth, while

the padre said the Committal Sentences and the Lord's Prayer —and said them, as Quickshaw usually did, rather angrily, with a ligament of moisture forming at his lips.

Tony was in time to watch a curious incident. One skeleton of abnormal length that lay almost on the brink of the precipitous cliff had a shell standing upright beside it, with the nose-cap screwed on. Perhaps because its upright position suggested a human agency, Quickshaw unscrewed the cap and examined the interior of the shell.

"Ha! Thought so!" he muttered. "Guessed something like that!"

From within it he drew a neatly folded piece of paper. He read it and handed it to Tony, whom he had recognized.

"Looks as though someone gambled on us coming along sooner or later," said he. "Here, get a move on, you fellows; dig his grave. Those spades aren't chairs to sit on; and we can't stay here all night."

Tony studied the paper. It looked like the torn-out fly-leaf of a cheap novel; and on it a clumsy hand had written with a copying-ink pencil the full details of the dead man: 340971 Private R. Oldways, 1/7 Lancashire Fusiliers, Killed May 6th." Thanks to the screwed-on shell-cap no rain had marred the writing.

What tale of anxious friendship explained this upright shell with its folded paper inside, who could say? One pictured a lonely figure returning after the battle to his fallen friend and placing beside him this identification paper, protected from wind and weather, in the forlorn hope that other men would one day come that way and find it. And six months later came Padre Quickshaw with his picks and spades to the dead man's side.

And, as the curious chances would have it, out stepped from among the burial party a tall man who exclaimed in a broad Lancashire accent, "Dick Oldways! *Dick Oldways!* Ah knew him. He coom fra Owdham same as Ah do." And he stared down at the elongated skeleton. "Bah gum!"

This was the first time that Jim Stott from Oldham, best of soldiers and best of friends, stood out before Tony as an individual and not as a mere name in the roll of C Company. There were reasons why Jim Stott should be remarkable; first, because it was strange, in these early years of the war when the battalions yet retained their territorial character, to find a Lancashire mill-hand in an Essex regiment; and secondly,

because, unlike most of these Lancashire weavers and minders, who were short and squat, Jim was a splendid figure of a man, six feet tall, and broad and powerful. Tony watched him as he stared down at the skeleton.

"Eh, Ah knew thee, lad, in Manchester; Ah did and all," he said. "Tha were killed in May, that's reet . . . aye, and tha were a tall chap—tall as me, I reckon. Dang, Ah'd ha' coom afore if Ah'd known as how tha were here, but Ah'll bury thee now, any road." And he fell to work with his spade, saying to the other men the while: "Ah'll tell you all aboot him some time, happen. He were a champion lad, Dick Oldways. Aye, Ah can tell you all aboot t'mill as he coom from."

He dug for a minute, but rested on his spade again and looked down at the skeleton. Seemingly he could not credit this meeting with Dick Oldways: it fascinated him.

"Aye, it's t'saam chap," he mused. "Ah've seen him oot with his lass, walking along t'road—Ah have that. They met at Class. I'm no-but just getting all aboot him . . . he weren't more nor twenty, and he played for Owdham Colts i' them days. . . . H'm, he looks old enoof now, doan't he?"

And Jim Stott was digging again.

Not at first had Tony observed that one of those around the padre was Colonel Tappiter himself, who had come out and was watching the burials with much interest. But, later on, when his men rolled two Turks into a grave and the padre mumbled some words over them and led the men in the Lord's Prayer, why then a light appeared on the Colonel's face, as if he were enjoying a moment of revelation; and he turned to Tony and said, "It seems rather a mug's game, sometimes, this—er—this war business, doesn't it, O'Grogan?"

Tony was in no hurry, and he remained with Quickshaw till the task of the morning was done. And all the while Achi Baba looked down upon the scene; and the territory of the Turks sloped to their trench parapets no great distance away; but neither artillery nor snipers interfered with the work. Perhaps this was not unusual, because this sector was seldom troubled nowadays by bullet or shell, but Tony liked to think that the Turk must have observed Quickshaw's party digging and dawdling, and deliberately refrained from disturbing them. For he would have guessed their occupation at once; and he was ever a bonny fighter.

As they walked away, Quickshaw almost apologized for what he had been doing. "It isn't good for the men to see all these blooming skeletons and stiffs about. Why the devil no overfed staff officer has thought of that before and ordered their burial I can't say. God knows the staff does little enough on Gallipoli at present to earn its pay. I don't see why it should be left to me to think of these perfectly obvious things. Come and have some lunch at Brigade, if you feel like it and can put up with the Brigadier."

Quickshaw's popularity in Leigh Ravine, where sat Scrase, Moulden and O'Grogan, was as great as in any other pocket of the Peninsula: it was the popularity that a group of men will give to a pet animal whose antics amuse them; say, a pet monkey. His protuberant eyes and his protruding mouth, both so like the features of a fish; his sparse hairs drawn across a bald head, his perpetual indignation with someone or something, and the way he never suffered his grin to grow into a smile, or his laugh to be more than a rather angry "Haw!"—these things amused them. And when it leaked out that an October Sunday was the padre's forty-first birthday, Scrase pronounced that there was nothing for it but to give him a dinner-party in Leigh Ravine. Quickshaw spat his contempt for the notion, but consented to come; and as an excuse for such weakness added: "To be sure, I've no desire to spend the evening with the Brigadier. The less I see of that man the better. I had another dust-up with him this morning."

"Padre! Padre!" Scrase shook his head sadly. "Not again, not again?"

"Most certainly again," Quickshaw assured him. "This morning as ever was. The old fool started to sniff because there was nothing but bacon and apricot jam for breakfast, so I promptly——"

"Brought in the mess accounts, plumped them on the table, and told him to get on with the job himself," supplied Scrase.

"Exactly. Or, rather, I suggested that the Brigade Major or the Staff Captain might take it on, since they've nothing to do nowadays except sit on their behinds and trim their nails."

"But, padre, my dear, that was rather rude, wasn't it?"

"Can't help it. If that old fool thinks that I've nothing better to do than to go trapesing over to Imbros or Tenedos twice a week to buy him an egg, he's—he's mistaken."

"So who's running the Brigade mess now?" asked Moulden.

"Well . . ." Quickshaw looked ashamedly out to sea, and admitted with half a grin that he had consented to serve for another short period. "The Brigadier apologized, or I wouldn't have done it, you can be sure of that!"

"I'd like to hear the Brigadier apologizing," said Scrase. "How did he do it?"

Quickshaw allowed the grin to develop; and Tony suspected that the padre, like many another good man, was not indifferent to the value of the entertaining character in which the army had dressed him, and would tell stories against himself to decorate it. "Oh, the old fool said, 'That's all right, padre; that's all right, padre. Mustn't get angry with us'; and when I assured him that it *wasn't* all right but all damn wrong, he wouldn't listen, but said sweetly, 'No, no, padre; no, no. You mustn't grow weary of well-doing. We're your flock, you know, and the Bible says you must feed your lambs'; and because I was fool enough to laugh at this, they all shouted that they were forgiven and that the padre had smiled, and there was a General Absolution, and a lot more rubbish like that—and—haw! haw!—the Brigadier pushed back the mess accounts to me and said, 'You'll keep all that bumf till next time, won't you, padre?'—and they went on with their breakfast as if all were over. But any more grousing from 'em, and I'm through with it! and as I said, the less I see of 'em all for a little while the better!"

So, the padre having consented to come, the officers of C Company hung the sandbag walls of their little mess with scrub from the ravine and with fir and heather from the uplands. Kit Scrase was so pleased with the branches of fir that he said, "By Jove, I suppose it isn't Palm Sunday by any chance, is it? That would be a topping coincidence," and, overcome by a feeling that it *was* Palm Sunday, he hurriedly sought a Prayer Book for confirmation. It was *not* Palm Sunday, this being October; and he tossed away the book in disappointment. It was only the C. of E. padre's birthday.

Now Hughes Anson, as we know, was a specialist in birthdays, and when the word travelled along to his trenches that Padre Quickshaw was dining with C Company that night, and inquiry elicited the reason why, he decided that such an occasion must be celebrated in other districts as well as in Leigh Ravine. How he celebrated it will shortly appear: meanwhile let it be said that Hughes Anson had early established a reputation

on the Peninsula. Rosy was the "star turn" of A Company. He was the type of officer about whom the men tell rich stories gleefully, and such a one is usually well liked and bravely followed. The men said that when he was "tuppence on the can" after dinner, he would work off his high spirits by running across No-Man's Land with a couple of cricket-ball bombs in his hands, and hurling them at the Turks, and doubling back. It was quite true; this was a favourite pastime of The Roseate Hughes when in liquor. They told how once, when there was an argument in the mess as to whether a mysterious Turkish trench was occupied or not, he stood up, pressed out his cigarette, and said that the best thing to do was to go and see; whereupon he immediately walked over to it, and looked in, and came back, saying casually, "No, there's no one there." It is an old observation that officers of this pattern often have charmed lives, and certainly Hughes Anson seemed able to walk unscathed through a darkness singing with bullets.

On the Birthday Sunday Tony chanced to meet Quickshaw an hour or two before he was due in C Company's mess. It was late afternoon, and he was climbing up a little gorge that opened out of the Gully Ravine. At the top of this Gorge were hidden the guns of the 460th Battery; and Tony, as he climbed, passed the horses of the gun teams tethered up the slopes. He was going to drink tea with a gunner officer whom he had discovered to be an Old Pauline like himself. Turning a bend in the track, he saw Quickshaw ahead of him toiling up the slope, and followed by his batman, who was carrying a sackful of army hymn-books. So? Then this meant Evensong at the battery.

Now, for a rousing Church service, go to a battery. Artillerymen are always hearty—perhaps it is something to do with their horses; they like a hearty oath, a hearty meal, and a hearty service. And a very good sight they are, the gunners and the bombardiers, when they are ready for their Church Parade; they have groomed themselves as they groom their horses; their harness glints; their spurs and buttons are a-glitter; and about their bandoliers, slung jauntily over their shoulders, there is a touch of braggadocio which makes you expect that any man may at some moment slap his chest and exclaim, "I am the Bandolero!" It is very good to see fifty or sixty of these swagger gunners drawn up for Church Parade at the top of a ravine, behind their watchful guns. No

sooner has the first hymn started than you realize that, whether or not they have come to the service to be good, they have certainly come to enjoy themselves. Here's a good hymn, they seem to say, and a good tune, so let's give tongue. Here's the end of the prayer, thank God, so all together with a snap, "Amen!" Here's another hymn, so let's all clear our throats, for we're going to make a good thing of this. Oh, this is where the sermon comes, is it?—well, let's sit down and enjoy it; he's a funny little cove, this padre, and is inclined to spit over the front rank when he's getting shirty, but he's got a head-piece on him, and he knows how to talk. Ho, one more rowdy hymn, and—heels together with a click and a clinking of spurs—"God save our gracious King, Long live our noble King." Dismiss! and back to the dug-outs, humming the hymns we have just sung.

At the 460th Battery such an Evensong was just over, and Tony was drinking his tea in the officers' mess, when there was rapid-fire along the front line, and, more surprising than this, the reverberation of the Turkish guns.

"Dammit," cried the O.C. "What the devil's that?"

The Turkish heavies, shaking the mess and rattling the crockery on the table, told pretty plainly what it was. The O.C. became restless, the junior officers witty.

"Nothing to get excited about," said they. "Johnny Turk has received some shells in his mail. Or perhaps the Germans have got through and joined up with the Turks. At any rate, it's nothing of importance."

But the O.C. remained preoccupied and impatient, and his disquiet was soon justified by the running arrival of a man with a telephone message. Instantly the O.C., having tersely said, "Battery Action," ran out of the mess and shouted orders to the men, who had thrown off their bandoliers and jackets and started on their tea. "Battery Action" called out the men nearest. "Battery Action": the word was flung from dug-out to dug-out, and cast like a bouncing ball down the ravine. Men left their knives stuck in their loaves, dropped their mugs of undrunk tea or their half-smoked cigarettes, and ran to their posts by the guns. The sides of the ravine came alive with movement like a cloven ant-heap. In a little more than a minute the four guns had each a team of silent men awaiting orders; and the O.C. was standing in the middle of the space where the Church Parade had been held.

"Thirty-six right," he called.

"Thirty-six right." The word went from gun to gun.

"Three six right." With a beautiful movement the guns swung round into position.

The Turkish bombardment swelled in volume, while the 460th and the other British batteries were strangely inactive. But at last a far-away British battery made a solitary reply. Then a second endorsed it. A third added its support. And one after another they joined in the quarrel, till it seemed that of all the British batteries on Gallipoli, the 460th alone had yet to speak. The four guns stared out together towards one point. The four teams uttered not a sound, but looked for the word to the O.C. where he stood. The little space which had echoed the hymns of evensong was silent except for the birds' twittering.

Just the other side of the Gully Ravine, Y Battery was spitting flame twenty times to the minute, and receiving high-explosive shells which threw up fountains of earth and chocolate smoke into the air. Now the concentrated fire of rifles and the angry spatter of machine-guns suggested that the infantry were out. Tony became anxious about his company, but was held to his place by one of those absurd "fixed ideas" which can seize a man in such a moment: he must see the 460th open fire before he moved.

"No. 1 gun, *fire!*" said the O.C.

The gun fired.

Tony climbed down the little ravine with his right ear singing from the noise.

It was between lights by this time, and the flashes of the guns lit the white walls of the Gully with a rosy light. The Gully Ravine, along which Tony must go for a quarter of a mile, was now "unhealthy": it was being sprinkled with shrapnel bullets which were dropping as windfalls drop when a gale is blowing in the cherry trees. It was almost deserted: a few men were seeking cover against its more precipitous sides like people pressing their backs against a high wall to get shelter from the rain; sometimes a horseman, breaking the rule that ordered walking in the Gully, went cantering or galloping home through the gathering darkness; and ever and again the dispatch riders on their motor-cycles went racing out of sight with their messages.

The infantry fire of rifles and machine-guns continued

unbroken. Tony hurried—ran—sprinted. He heard a distant boom; and another, and another. That must be the Navy, the good old Navy standing by. Magnificent! His spine shivered with appreciation.

In the Mule Trench he met Hughes Anson.

"What's it all about?" he asked eagerly.

"It's the padre's birthday," said Hughes.

"Don't be a fool. What is it really?"

"It's the padre's birthday." Hughes nodded his confirmation. "It *is*. I'm rather worried about it, to tell the truth. Things have gone farther than I expected. Damn! I hope no one's killed."

And he explained. He had decided that the least they could do in honour of Quickshaw would be to fire a *feu de joie* at sundown, so, after a long deliberation on ways and means, he had sent a glowing rumour along the Brigade front that Bagdad had fallen, and that the news was absolutely official, this time. Well, it was a tremendous success, that rumour (said Hughes), and, as usual, when they got the news officially, the men had immediately decided to send the information over to Johnny Turk in the form of several rounds rapid. Johnny, being a born fool, had mistaken this "little bit of gaiety" as the preamble to an infantry attack, and replied with the deuce of a bombardment. Then our guns, not clear what he was up to, and certainly not disposed to let him have it all his own way, had begun to register on his batteries with a view to silencing them. And now, God help us, some old battleships had come out from Imbros to see that we were not let down, and other ships were doubtless on their way from Mudros, and poor old Achi Baba, more than ever certain that all these things meant an attack on a large scale, was engaging the Navy and playing hell with all our lines of communication. "Damn! I hope no one's killed," Hughes concluded. "I say, Bungay! Supposing a battleship's sunk with all hands."

Whether or not Hughes Anson, like a fond father, was holding too generous an opinion of the part his little rumour had played in this sudden fury it is difficult to tell. No mere subaltern knew the real cause of these quick and frequent storms on Gallipoli. But, anyhow, he need have no lives on his conscience, for nobody was killed. A few were wounded and went down the Gully that evening and on to the hospital ships bound for England. This didn't worry him at all, since

he held that he had done them the kindest of services, so he could return to his contemplation of the birthday. The result of this contemplation was that at eleven o'clock that night he appeared, a dark shape, at the door of C Company's mess where the festivities were illuminating the ravine.

"We've come for the padre," he said. "We thought some one had better take him home to Brigade."

And Scrase, Tony, Moulden and Quickshaw, looking out into the night, saw that Hughes had a following of six other officers who were standing darkly around a stretcher.

"What the devil!" began Scrase.

"We'll carry him back. He's tight by now, isn't he? If he isn't he ought to be. It's his birthday."

Quickshaw spluttered indignantly, but not without a suggestion of laughter.

"Don't be such puerile idiots!" he said.

Hughes soothed him. "Now come quietly, padre. There'll be no trouble if you don't make a fuss. We'll wait till you're ready, if you like."

"I'm not going in that thing," said Quickshaw.

"Yes, you are. You can explain what you like to the Brigade, but you've got to arrive back on a stretcher on your birthday night."

Scrase protested—but his protests were blunted by his amusement. "He's my guest. If he doesn't want to go on the stretcher, he shan't. But of course, if he likes to . . ."

"There are seven of us," Hughes indicated. "We are prepared to overcome any opposition."

Scrase turned to Quickshaw.

"What about it, padre?"

"*Paw!* If they like to make idiots of themselves," said Quickshaw, "*I* don't mind. It's they who'll look the fools, not me."

"Quite so, quite so," Hughes agreed. "Come on then, padre. Get in."

The grin was on Quickshaw's face. "Oh, I'll go with 'em, Scrase—idiots! They're bound to overpower us in the end. And if they like to save me a walk——"

"Precisely!" said Hughes. "Come on, you fellows."

And on the stretcher, smoking a cigarette, perfectly comfortable and never protesting, the C. of E. chaplain returned to Brigade Headquarters, his bearers and mourners singing.

CHAPTER VII

THE PENINSULA PAIN

THEN Tony blundered. It was a small blunder, but a major one, since its consequences weaved their way like a dark central thread through the rest of his days in the army. He made his blunder, and thereafter he, who had rushed into the war hoping to escape from his petty personal cravings, found that a personal trouble in his mind was likely to grow larger than, and to eclipse, the mighty argument of a world at war.

Stagnation was on Gallipoli, and the eyes of a sick and listless army turned towards other fronts where the British were campaigning—to Mesopotamia, and East Africa, and France and the new front at Salonika—in the hope that Victory, which had taken wing and flown from their desolate plateau, might be alighting in splendour elsewhere. Great things must surely be happening on these other fronts. And Mesopotamia, where the drama of Kut was working itself out, was the front that most of all drew the eyes of Gallipoli in the later months of 1915. If the rumour that Townshend and his little force in Kut had been relieved, and that Bagdad had fallen, visited Cape Helles once, it visited it a hundred times, and the men, as we have seen, would greet it with a *feu de joie*. And when, in October, there was issued a G.R.O. inviting young officers to "transfer to the Indian Army," all read it as a "transfer to Mesopotamia," since the Indian Army was conducting the Mesopotamian enterprise. Tony, new to the war and still possessed with his gay delight in its romance and adventure, felt his heart leap in response to this call from Kut and the East. He discussed it with Scrase, who said, "Yes, you go, Bungay. You go and save Townshend. Why shouldn't you? 'Join the Army and see the world.' There's nothing doing here, and it looks as though there would be

a lot doing there. We shall be sorry to lose you, of course, but don't let that stand in your way. Besides, who wouldn't get out of this filthy hole if he had half a chance?" but when Tony asked him why, then, he didn't go himself, Scrase looked away and suggested that the matter stood differently for him, since the Royal West Essex was the battalion which he had joined in August 1914 and was minded to stay with till the end. "But I don't see why you shouldn't go. Presumably you were only seconded to us temporarily, and you may have to leave us at any time."

Tony was fond of Kit, and he was never very reasonable where he was fond: so now, though he had come to him, hoping to get encouragement in his desire to go, he was rather hurt at the readiness with which his friend offered it. Then he bethought himself that Scrase, always reticent about his emotions, was quite likely to put goods in his window which were the opposite of those he sold indoors; and he was comforted, and went off to find Moulden, to whom just now he was showing an ostentatious amity in the belief that Moulden and he were tacitly reconciled.

He found him in the Western Birdcage, a very terrible bombing pit; and here, in this most unsuitable sty, they stood face to face and discussed the matter. Moulden was as encouraging as Scrase; so encouraging that, had Tony been less ready to believe the best of men, he might have suspected that the fellow, for some hidden reasons of his own, was urging him to go. Moulden stared at him out of his dark hollow eyes, and argued the case for his going, subtly lifting it to its highest plane, subtly hinting that himself, in staying where he was, would be doing a lesser thing than O'Grogan if he answered the Mesopotamian call.

"That's right. You go," he said. "I'd go myself like a shot, only I'm a good deal older than you—really—and I've a fancy that the Peninsula, poisonous though it is, is a picnic compared with what Mespot's going to be. I mean to say, I'd go if I was ordered to, but volunteering's another matter—really. Honestly, I admire you for it, I must say."

"Its climate is undoubtedly worse," Tony allowed.

"That's right. That's what I mean. I've just managed to survive the Gallipoli heat, but I'm darned if I want to see another Eastern summer. I hear Mespot's summer is Gallipoli's multiplied by ten—really—but you're young; you can stand it."

"And it's pretty dull here," argued Tony.

"That's right. Put it like this: I mean, we don't often talk about our motives, but I take it you want to get somewhere where you can do a decent job—really; and honestly, I don't think we shall do anything more here except mark time. Whereas in Mespot there's going to be a war."

"Yes, that's what I think," said Tony. "We're not going to let Townshend be captured. We daren't. If we did the East would rise."

"That's right. That's what's behind this G.R.O.—really. My gosh! you almost make me want to go too."

Other officers sang the same tune. They would leave Gallipoli like a shot—good God, yes!—only they'd not much stomach for old Mespot from all they'd heard. No leave to England from there. No mails. No getting back quickly after the war was over . . . no, they'd stick it out on Gallipoli. . . .

Hughes Anson shook his inclination to go, for Hughes Anson was always so violently frank. He said, "Of course go, you fool, if you want to. You've not been very long with us, but by all means better yourself if you see a chance of it. And thank you for calling on us. . . . Have a spot of whisky. . . . Yes, you go, my boy: it might be wise. God knows how any of us are going to be got out of this bloody death-trap alive. Obviously we can't be going to advance any more, or there'd be some reinforcements appearing; and how the hell we can ever go back, I don't understand; the winter's on top of us, and it'll smash up all our sea communications, for sure. I should 'op it, if I were you. Go while the going's good."

To which Tony at once replied, "Well, now you've said the one thing that makes it impossible for me to go."

"Oh, don't be such a bloody sentimentalist," retorted Hughes. "The British army gave up heroics soon after the first week in August, 1914. Besides, if you want to be a sentimentalist, why die here to-morrow if you can do some more work in Mespot and die there next year?"

"Well, what about you, ass?" Tony demanded. "Are you going?"

Hughes looked away. "I'm not invited," he said at length. "I'm over thirty."

Tony returned to Scrase with this disturbing argument of

Hughes Anson's that the British divisions could never be extricated from Gallipoli alive; and Scrase instantly made a small matter of it; though he did allow himself, illogically enough, the laughing conclusion, "Well, if old Rosy's right, so much the more reason for going."

And from all this counsel—if counsel it could be named, since it consisted, in most cases, of men saying the opposite of what they thought—Tony distilled the wrong conclusion: this was his blunder. He concluded that his mind might be at ease, and even congratulatory, about his transfer to the Indian army, but his outer manner must be one of self-depreciation and cynicism. He must make fun of his volunteering for Mesopotamia and suggest that his sole reason for clearing off the Peninsula was that he didn't like the look of things under Achi Baba—no, not in the least! There was still in him much of the "new boy" who was diligent to behave as the older boys in the school were behaving; so to the friendly voices that hailed him: "Hallo, O'Grogan! I see you're one of the volunteers?" he would answer, "Rather! what do *you* think? Three months on this foul spot is three months too long, isn't it? I'm fed up with it. And what's more, it ain't safe." And the friendly voices acknowledged his wisdom: "Quite right too! . . . Sensible feller!"

That was in October, and nothing showed Tony that he had made a mistake: the sinister little seed which he had sown lay underground, nor did it thrust a shoot above the surface in one month nor in two. Indeed, it might have died underground, if the chances of war had grouped themselves differently and provided no atmosphere for its growth. For nothing immediate happened; he had imagined that he would be ordered to proceed forthwith to Lemnos or to Alexandria; and therein he showed how small was his experience of the British Army in the field; for it was not so at all; nothing happened. November succeeded October, and December November; the great blizzard came and went; the rains fell and converted the dust of the ravines into soupy water-courses; the winter seas beat menacingly round the cliffs and beaches of Gallipoli, and the ways looked very dark for the army on that narrow headland, and Tony was still with the Royal West Essex, keeping company with Scrase and Moulden and Hughes Anson, and being served by his batman, Joe Wylie. At first he supposed that his Indian Army papers were dawdling

along to London; then, hearing of the enemy's submarine activity in the Mediterranean, he wondered if they had been "lost at sea"; and at length he forgot all about them. By December, had he thought of them at all, he would have been glad of their miscarriage, for plainly it would not do to leave the battalion now. Now the Germans had forced their way through Serbia and made good their junction with the Turks, and any day Germany and Turkey might bear down in power upon the British divisions huddled and trapped at Helles. None on Helles, in December, 1915, but knew that the army was in desperate plight.

None of the officers, that is to say. Did those patient soldiers, behind their grumbling and their laughter, ever really doubt that in one way or in another, forwards or backwards, their officers would lead them to safety? Probably not; they gave no sign that they did, for their acrid jests about the British Empire, and the Great War, and the Brass Hats meant no more now than before; they were no bitterer to-day in stagnation and defeat than yesterday on the threshold of victory. They were the same jests, angrily covering the same confidence, wilfully belying the same good nature. Ah no, it would not be good to desert these men.

Even at so late an hour in the campaign, and at so darkening and silent an hour, the men had not lost all hope of their triumphant march to Constantinople. The newspaper readers among them had a good foundation-stone for their fabric of comfort in their certainty that, since Britain could not be beaten by Turkey without losing her whole Mohammedan Empire, she was simply compelled to win on Gallipoli. The unread, having no intellectual juices for the digestion of such an argument, were content to live and breathe by the flying vapour of rumours. Fred Roberts, and Jim Stott, the gigantic fellow from Oldham, being townsmen both, were newspaper readers, and Jim a very intelligent one; Ernie Botten, the labourer from Twineham fields, had possibly opened a paper six times in his life. One night Tony was sitting on a slope of Y ravine, waiting with a party of men to fare forth on a midnight fatigue, and all these three were of the party. Ever ready to chat with his men, he presently found himself presiding at a discussion between Fred and Jim and Ernie on the fortunes of the war. Fred was in the grumbling vein—he so often was!

"*Us* git relieved? Nah! Don't you believe it, Ernie. We're here for the duration. They've forgotten all abaht

us. They've lawst us; that's what they done. The old War Office has jest kinda mislaid the 162nd Division. In ten years time some old General in Whitehall—Whitehall's where the Government Offices are, Ernie."

"Yum," nodded Ernie, who was probably no wiser after this information than before.

"Some old General in Whitehall'll wake up and say, 'Good Gawd! where are the Essex Division? Gawd damn it! Can't someone look up their files? Last 'eard of on Gallipoli, what? You down say so! Bless me soul. Jest write and get it confirmed that they're still there, will yer? If you can't find them offer a small reward.' See, Ernie, that's what'll happen."

"Stoof!" demurred Jim Stott, who had all the sanguine kindliness that goes with a giant's body and all the humour that goes with a good brain. "This is the calm afore the storm Ah reckon. We daren't be beaten here, tha knows; so there's summat in the wind soomwhere, tha can bet thi boots; and we'll know all aboot it soon enough. There's bin a rumour about Kitchener coomin' in person with a million lads to finish off t'show afore Christmas, and Ah shouldn't be surprised if there weren't summat to it, meself. Soom o' th'lads say as how he's already arrived at Mudros. Had you heard that, sir?" Jim Stott was bi-lingual; after talking to his fellow privates in broadest Lancashire he would quite often turn and speak to his officers in standard English. Tony admitted he had heard the rumour.

"'E's probably come to conduct the evacuation," suggested Fred Roberts grimly.

"Well, and what's wrong with an evacuation, any road?" asked Jim, executing a marvellous right-about in his argument. "Ah've no objection to evacuating t'Peninsula, meself. As a place, Ah reckon nothing to it, summah."

"No more do I," Roberts agreed. "But an evacuation ain't quite the same thing as your victory, is it?"

"Gammon! We shan't evacuate," protested Ernie Botten; but having no cogent reasons to offer why we shouldn't evacuate, he was satisfied to state it as a fact. "No, we shan't evacuate."

Jim Stott corroborated him.

"Course not, there's hoondreds o' moves we might bring off yet. Aren't there, sir?"

"Perhaps," said Tony.

"Sich as which?" demanded Fred Roberts sarcastically.

"Well, there's soom says that General Botha's going to land at t'Bulair lines with a South African army—eh, and he's a gradely lad, Botha. And Bob Green, he makes out that one of these fine days the Turks'll see a few million Japs arriving off t'Golden Horn."

"And jist 'ow will they 'ave got there?" begged Fred.

"Worked their way across Siberia, o' course, tha silly gowk! Doan't you know your geography? Where was tha fetcht oop? Aye, they'll a' worked their way across Siberia, they will."

"Oh? They'll a' done that, will they?"

"Aye; and at t'saam time the Eye-talians'll have landed at Smyrna, all ready to join oop with t'Japs. That's t'rumour."

"A damn fine rumour too!"

"I *did* hear," offered Ernie Botten, "that the Russian airy-oplanes were all over Constantinople yesterday, and the ruddy place is in flames."

"Yes," said Fred Roberts, "and you've 'eard twice a week for the last three months that the Suvla army'd carried their little hill of Sari Bair; and that consequently our little Achi Baba was deserted——"

"Well——" began Ernie.

"But Sari Bair," proceeded Fred, unmindful of the interruption, "looks to me to be as sahnd as ever it was, and Achi was coughing up some nice heavy stuff at us last night. A dam-silly rumour; that's all it was."

"Well, but it'll be true one day, won't it, yer chump?" objected Ernie Botten, with simple logic.

"Will it? I *don't* think," Fred denied.

"Well, anyhow——" and the rest of the conversation was a recital by Ernie Botten of all the latest rumours from the Western front, and their denial by Fred Roberts. The German fleet had ventured out to the bombardment of Calais, and had lost eighteen vessels when attacked by the British fleet. "Not likely, Ernie!" Ostend had been captured by a landing of the British—"Don't you believe it, Ernie"—but as a reprisal, a Zeppelin had raided London and caused eighteen thousand casualties. "And do 'em good too!" The Kayser was dead—blown up in a Belgian hotel——

But this last was too much, even for Jim Stott.

"Aye," says he, "and soom o' the bits coom down in Wales, tha knows . . . eh, Ernie lad, where was tha fetcht oop?"

That was all. It was time to move, and they filed forward

to their night fatigue, up the foot-track of the ravine and along the communication trench, and over the plateau under view of the Turks; their silence broken only by an occasional voice: 'Keep touch. . . . *Put that light out!* . . . Break step."

So their levity, their cynicism and their hope. And yet—and yet, over-spreading the Gallipoli plateau, there was a peculiar pain which could sometimes wear through this laughing veneer and release a poor breaking humanity beneath. Tony was to visit other fronts of the World War, but never again did he find quite the same wear and sadness as he remembered on Gallipoli; they seemed happier battlefields, for all their heavier gunfire, than that old, far-off plateau, under its hill of Achi Baba and its Levantine stars.

The Peninsula pain! Did some of its causes lie in the land itself—that elevated wilderness of scrub and heather, where the summer heat and dust and flies were followed by the winter chills and mud; that cramped headland where there was escape nowhere from the ranging shells and the marching dysentery, where none ever saw a woman or a child but only the dull khaki of sick and over-worked soldiers, where the brightest spots in all the brown desolation were the red tabs on the staff officers' jackets, and God knows that these flowers brought little delight to anyone; that sea-girt country of the untimely dead, whose bodies, buried and unburied, were almost as numerous as the men who walked among them; that spit of land, with its beaches lashed by choppy seas, where the ships must unload before all things ammunition and food, so that timber was scarce and the dug-outs bad and the water chlorinated and the comforts negligible, and the mails from home and friends took five weeks to arrive if they arrived at all; this narrow and beleagured scene, lying quiet but restless beneath its intangible atmosphere of defeat?

Perhaps there was something in Tony—an Irish affectionateness, let us say, or his ever-deepening love for these men, sprung from a wound in his poet's heart—that enabled him to perceive this pain more easily than most, and even encouraged one or two to speak with him as they spoke with no other. There had been "Little Willie" Sparrow who broke down by his side on the firing step. And now there was Art Webster.

No one would have supposed that Art Webster, Moulden's batman, had "got religion." Nor had he, in the evangelist's use of that phrase; he was a laughing, blaspheming, would-be comedian of thirty, who tried to model himself on Joe Wylie, but the rôle of the "funny man" came less naturally to him. He had less natural force than Joe; he was an echo rather than an original noise; whereas Joe was nothing if not an original noise. Thin and sallow, with a toothbrush moustache, and a cigarette behind his ear—and with his wit so palpably effortful because the root of the man was serious and sentimental—Art Webster made an excellent foil or "opposite" to Joe. Hear Art Webster and Joe, as the shells come shrieking towards their cookhouse this morning. *H'wish . . . plonk!* The fire and the saucepans and Art and Joe, all four, are hidden behind a dense cloud. As the cloud ascends and blows away, Joe is seen in the smoke, like Pluto at the mouth of Hell, waving a ladle above his head triumphantly and yelling, "It missed me! It missed me!" Gathering by the roars of laughter that his turn is a success, he splutters with laughter himself, passes his hand along his lank moustache, and yells again, "It missed me! It missed poor old Joe Wylie!" And Art rises from his stomach, brushing his shirt and saying to the shell, "Pass friend, all's well." Another boom from the Turkish lines. "'Old tight!" shouts Joe. "Now 'old tight, all." And Art, already prone again, cries, "What are you ducking for, Joe? The bloody shell ain't 'it yer yet. Gaw! I believe you're afraid." The shell whistles over their heads and explodes lower down the hill. Joe stands up, and looks in the direction of the distant Turks, and lifts his ladle in a vague warning to Achi Baba. "'Ere! What's to do with yer, Abdul? What's to do with yer? Jest you stop it. I shan't speak twice." And likewise Art Webster stands there and rebukes the Turkish air: "Give over, Johnny! Give over now! Can't you see that I want to get on with me dinner?" In answer comes a third shell; and Joe throws one look towards Constantinople and turns an offended back to it. "I done with yer, John. There now! I done with yer. I said as I should." And Art tosses his ladle away and stands with arms akimbo, in a dignified patience. "Well, I shan't get on with me dinner, that's all. I'll leave it be. A bit thick, coming it dirty like that, jest as I want me dinner."

And yet, one day in talkative mood, Art Webster confessed to Tony that he was "that down sometimes, never hearing

nothing from his missus, and all, and what with this blasted diarrhœa, he could wish he was really religious again and could pray proper like he done when he was a nipper; and that, any old how, he prayed when a shell come near 'im—prayed like a good'un, saying what the minister told him to say every night before going to sleep when he was a little'un in his Sunday school: which was, "Into Thy 'ands, O Lord, I commend me sperrit;" and, laughing, he asked Tony if the thrill of the shell's approach wasn't well illustrated by the brace of sentences he often found himself coupling together: "Into Thy 'ands, O Lord—Hell! that was a near one!" Soon he was inquiring of Tony whether, for his part, he believed that in the event of a loose sort of feller like hisself being killed, he would ever meet his missus and his nippers again. It would make it kinda easier for him, if he thought he would, said Art Webster, "'cos I reckon I'm fonder of my missus than I knew, sir. I dessay you won't believe it, sir, but t'other night when the mail come, and there was nothin' in it for me, I jest went off by meself and did a proper old blubber. Straight I did."

And Jim Stott: you shall hear a tale of Jim Stott, that good-natured fellow from Oldham. Once when the R.W.E.s were in reserve, there was a concert improvised among them by Padre Quickshaw: and it was held on a hill-slope near Gully Beach, and attended by a General and his staff. The rake of this theatre floor was tilted the wrong way; the audience sat on an upward slope and the performers sang above them; and the indifferent stars looked on. There were humorous songs that drew much laughter; there were clean jokes (a few) and dirty ones; and there was "Gungha Din." And there were songs by men who requested the Master of the Ceremonies that their contribution should be announced as "Sentimental."

"Private Jones. Sentimental," shouted Quickshaw, and seemed disgusted at having to shout anything so stupid.

Now the men dearly loved these sentimental songs, especially those that spoke of a grey-haired mother's tears, or of a sailor son sleeping in his watery grave. If there was a death in the last verse, and the singer interpreted it with dramatic effect—as he generally did, drawling it painfully—he was certain to evoke an uproar of clapping and cheers and cat-calls. And songs about home too; they listened to these in a tense silence and with staring eyes; for they were very homesick, one and all, and liked their sickness

indulged. So we see the astonishing fact that men who would have died rather than speak in ordinary conversation about their love of the homeland, unless, to be sure, they spoke of it in ridicule, were quite ready to hear an allusion to it, provided the allusion was arranged in a metrical form and set to a melody; exactly as they were quite ready to bawl on Church Parade "Jesu, lover of my soul, Let me to thy bosom fly"—words which, if they had given a moment's thought to their meaning, would have sent the blood and the sweat mounting to their brows for shame at having uttered them.

Now Jim Stott fancied his singing voice not lightly, and his singing style; and of a surety the former was very good and the latter remarkable, for it achieved the most lugubrious wail by the slurring of each note into the next. He favoured the company with two songs, one comic and one sentimental. "Private Stott. Comic," announced Quickshaw sadly; and Jim Stott began:

> "Wheer hadst tha' bin when Ah seed thee
> On Owdham Edge bout 'at,
>
> "Tha'd bin a coortin' Mary Jane
> On Owdham Edge bout 'at. . . .

The song drew applause, though not enough, one would have imagined, to warrant an encore; but either Jim Stott, in the flush of his big effort, heard a more enthusiastic applause coming up the slope than was actually there, in which case he did not differ from many another artist, or he had come prepared to do a double turn and was resolved to go through with it, let the people cry for it or not—in which case, too, he was well within the profession's traditions. So Quickshaw announced that Private Stott would kindly oblige again with a sentimental song, "The Dear Homeland." And if the success of "Owdham Edge" was dubious there could be no question about the popularity of "The Dear Homeland." It must have been, one thinks, a trashy song, for its words, so far as they come back to one across the years, ring somewhat thus:

> "Homeland, homeland, when shall I see you again? . . .
> Land of my birth, dearest place on earth,
> It may be for years, it may be for ever—
> Dear homeland, good-bye."

But how those words captured and held this audience of tired soldiers, seated in rows and tailor-wise on a slope at Gully

Beach; while the indifferent stars looked on! These listeners trained their eyes like searchlights on the singer. In their emotion they pulled more strenuously at their pipes, or let them go out. When the chorus freed their voices, they matched them to the drawling tones of the singer; and the result was a sound as of a thousand penitents chanting a *Miserere*. "It may be for years, it may be for ever . . ." the psalm rolled out to sea like a moaning wind. The chorus completed, they gave a round of clapping to show that the song was going well, and then, greater tribute to the singer, relapsed into an utter stillness, that they might drink deep of the second verse. And Jim Stott put all that was in him into that second verse—but he never finished it. . . . It is not easy to tell of thee, thou giant, Jim Stott, who came from the land of clogs and mills where men may feel emotion but do not show it; still, let the story go. Jim's voice began to tremble, and at the second chorus, "Homeland, homeland, when shall I see you again?" he gulped and broke down in tears like an overwrought woman, and walked hurriedly from his earthy platform. And the incident seemed hardly painful; just natural and inevitable. For a moment the collapse of Jim Stott charged the air with a sympathy that swelled the throat and moistened the eye of many another; and then the concert went on. "Private Webster. Comic." "Good old Art! Come on, Arty."

Ah, but these are stories of the perished years, and of men who have passed and are gone, as though they had never been; one wonders who will heed them and believe. A few, perhaps. Some will think them in ill accord with their ideas of English reserve and phlegm; and so they are; but those who cut their homes out of the distant earth of the Peninsula will remember and understand.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUARTERMASTER SPEAKS

ALTHOUGH the Royal West Essex went sometimes into "rest," moving back into the sheltered dug-outs on Geogheghan's Bluff, or into the reserve trenches of the Eski Line, they always returned to the same western sector of the firing line; and the officers of C Company were able to lease anew, and not unhappily, their "seaside bungalows" in Leigh Ravine. It was as if Divisional Headquarters were too disheartened nowadays to trouble about moving a brigade from one sector to another. Usually the battalion was happier in the line than in reserve: in the line there was little to do but stand to arms at sunrise and sunset, and cast a friendly bomb at the Turks once or twice between meals; but in reserve—ach! to hell with it!—there were digging fatigues and water fatigues and ration fatigues; and probably twice as many shells. And the Gallipoli plagues were as bad in Geogheghan's Bluff as they were in Leigh Ravine.

The programme of plagues had now reached the mice and the mud items—the lice being a permanent accompaniment—not to say a running accompaniment. The mice in the dug-outs were an accursed thing. Scarcely would Tony be rolled up in his blankets and thinking of sleep when they would begin their operations. They issued from holes in the sandbags and brought down a landslide of earth, in which, by some mischance, themselves would often come hurtling down. They ran over the floor, upsetting the bottles; they gnawed the two large egg crates which constituted Tony's bed (he had been obliged to devise something which would lift his valise off a floor that ran with rain); they pushed their noses into any food which was not in Julienne tins, and into much that was so closeted, by effecting an entrance over the parapet and under the lid; they nibbled the Sam Browne

belt and the revolver holster; and they tore up the newspapers and carried off portions of the *Sunday Times* and *Punch* to read in their dug-outs. The officers organized "battery actions," in which they sat in the dark in one another's dug-outs, armed with entrenching tools to slay them at sight. One morning Hughes Anson brought a bayonet into Tony's dug-out, and fondling it and flashing it in the sun, said, "See that? That's killed four."

"What, Turks?" asked Tony.

"No, fool, MICE."

And another day he brought three of them impaled on the bayonet to C Company, as an offering to their Mess stores.

Sometimes it seemed a shame to kill them, they were such pretty little creatures, with ears like tiny gramophone trumpets and long tails; and perhaps their irruptions only meant that they had lost their timorous natures and were resolved to be neighbourly, now that men, by burrowing in the earth and sleeping under the roots, had shown such a kinship with themselves.

When the mice subsided, one tried to capture sleep before they should begin again, but in the quiet and the warmth the lice began.

Abandoning sleep on such a night, Tony lit his candle-lantern and put on woollen gloves and wrote to Honor.

"*My Dearest Honor,*

"*Hughes Anson of whom I have told before, is a humorous cove, and whenever the rain is drenching into his dug-out, and a gusty wind is trying to carry off the ground-sheets which are all he has for roof, and he can't lace them together because the rain is pouring down his arms and his neck, he just sits down with his feet in the dissolvinl floor and says, 'Well, I'll write to my wife; that's all.' I feel rather in that mood now; so here goes.*

"*The most glorious parcel arrived from you yesterday with those pants. The pants are topping—most welcome; because lately I have been feeling rather cold about my peninsulas. Tell the Working Party that the louse-proof shirts were very popular with the men, to whom I issued them. When I asked Fred Roberts and Jim Stott and others if they'd like a medicated shirt, they said, 'Well, sir, I don't mind if I do;' which is their way of saying 'Thanks awfully.' The fly nets were too late to be of use this year, but they will be invaluable on the Peninsula during the summers of* 1916, '17, '18, *and* '19 (*for*

we expect to be here for ever). All the flies (1915 model) were killed in the great blizzard. What we are suffering from now is mice and lice. Some say the mice are not mice at all, but some kind of jerboa. I don't know. At any rate they keep us awake all night. They run over our beds and chew the string and sick it up on the floor; and you can never sleep, can you? when there's someone retching in the room.

"This morning I taught my servant, Joe Wylie, who is an excellent cook, to do some onions with sugar in the way you used to do them when we were first married. Kit Scrase, after sampling them, said he'd have plain boiled onions in future, but he's often rude. I think perhaps I put in too much sugar, because it was rather like onions and treacle. But the smell carried me right back to the little kitchen at Sheep's Eye and the garden outside, and the Sussex weald stretching to the foot of Wolstonbury. Moulden and I are now getting on awfully well. He's not a saint; in fact he's essentially a liar and a sneak and a slacker; he has not done a stroke more work than he's obliged to since I've known him; but he likes to see me working. En passant, while I have been writing to you, I have caught a couple on my arm.

"I am afraid this is one of my silly letters, but the reason is that, in spite of everything I feel so thundering well. The cold snap broke on the last day of November, and the first part of December has been glorious. The Government has done its duty by us nobly; they land fresh meat every day when the seas permit.

"At present I am living on Brooke's topping sonnet in '1914' —you've heard of him, I hope; he died in these parts. In these poems he glories in his emancipation, through the opportunity of war, from all that is ignoble and petty; and talks about the 'peace' and 'safety' to be found in rising to the height of a great hour. And they just get me, somehow. I can't explain it, but, when circumstances are at their most pestilential, I always find myself quoting one of his lines, 'Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there.' The few poems I sent you of my own are absolute tosh compared with his."

In these days the trenches and mule-saps and the cart road down the Gully Ravine were ankle-deep in mud; or, after a heavy rainfall, were trickling burns and running streams; and Tony, going about his daily occasions, had long resigned himself to the habit of paddling through them and changing into dry garments when he got home. So had Padre Quickshaw, who probably walked more miles each day than any other man on the Peninsula. Padre Quickshaw was getting very irritable with it all; and one morning, seeing Tony's

boots and puttees plastered with red mud, he seemed to realize, as in a vision, the full force of Cosmic Evil; and he declared abruptly:

"*I'm* not going on with it! My waders are worn out, and I've only one pair of boots that keeps out the water. Either I'll get one of the quartermasters to give me a couple of pairs of artillery boots, or I'll jack everything up. And some of their thick pants too, and a pair of tommy's serge trousers. *I'm* not going to ruin the only decent pair of breeches I've got."

"Jove!" cried Tony. "I'd like a pair of those topping lace-up boots that the transport men wear. Do you think old Grimsby 'd give us some?"

"I shall see to it that he does. We'll go and tackle him now. If he refuses—well, let him! The Principal Chaplain says he'll transfer me to Alexandria the minute I tell him I need a change. And I shall go! *I've* no desire to stay here and be killed."

So they set off to visit Grimsby at his Dump, in the Gully Ravine. Quartermaster Grimsby was one of the "characters" of the Royal West Essex; such a character as only the world's armies produce, but they abundantly. Before receiving his commission as Honorary Lieutenant and Quartermaster, he had been, of course, a sergeant; and, except for the two stars on his shoulder-strap, he was a sergeant still—with his six-foot height, his out-thrown chest, his clipped concise moustache and his florid skin. He had also served, for a period, as a cavalry riding-master; and, if the language of a sergeant is notorious, what shall be said of that of a cavalry riding-master? The foul flow that issued from Quartermaster Grimsby, when provoked, was enough to arrest a shell in mid-air and send it flying back for very shame into the nozzle of its gun. At all times, in choler or in calm, his voice had the thick consistency of a solid thing which has often been soaked in good liquor and now and then, perhaps, completely dissolved in it; and you felt that his talk, having known what it was, on many a jovial night, to escape the control of a fuddled brain and roam abroad in freedom, had never come wholly under that discipline again; it was always at large, even if sometimes at a lesser distance than usual from home.

So far he was no more than true to a common type; but with these ordinary qualities he contrived to mix those of an ardent High Churchman, full of controversies, texts, expositions

and proselytizing zeal; and the mixture, at least to a civilian mind, was rich and rare. Grimsby was Acting Transport Officer as well as Quartermaster, and had command over an attachment of turbanned Indians and swarthy Zionists who lived along his transport lines; these "niggers"—they were all "niggers" to him—he hated roundly, but he hated the mere mental conception of a Nonconformist far more. The sight of a terrified Zionist skulking under the belly of his mule when the shelling began could not draw from him such a vocabulary—though it did well—as the mere whisper of the word Methody. His temper, when inflamed with religious controversy and with whisky, could attain such heat that Tony, let it be said frankly, was afraid of him, and had not hitherto amassed enough courage to visit him and beseech a free issue of boots and winter clothing. He was apprehensive now as he walked down the Gully with Quickshaw, but there was no trace of anxiety about the protruding eyes and carp-like mouth of his friend.

Grimsby's Dump was piled about one of those recesses in the Gully where the high cliff walls had caved in and softened into a gentle slope; and as they came within view of it, they saw the soldierly figure of Grimsby standing at his dug-out door and staring in their direction.

"Good God, here's the parson!" he cried. "Hi, there! you loafers! Get on your feet"—this to the transport men, Zionists and Indians—"and *'Shun!* No—As you were! *'SHUN!* Why the hell don't you salute the Church properly? Bloody heathens! . . . Well, sir, come in"—this to Quickshaw—"and don't say you've come to stop me swearing, because it's been tried before. Come and have a drink."

They passed under the low door of his dug-out, which, being a quartermaster's, was luxuriously furnished: it had a low table, and six chairs, and an oil stove, and blankets for tapestry all round its sandbagged walls.

"What'll you take, sirs? Whisky? Gin? Rum? Lime-juice?" He had returned to the door. "Wandsworth! Damn that lad, where is he? *Wandsworth!* He was sent to me for light duty, and, poor boy, he's done more work running up and down these steps, bringing drinks for visitors, than ever he's done in his life before. One of you chaps find Wandsworth and tell him to get Holy Church a drink. Look alive: get a *jeldi* on about it! Now then, gentlemen, sit down.

You, sir?" He pushed a chair for Tony and sat on another himself, continuing: "Well, Father, you'll have your drink in a minute. But tell me: you haven't come for my soul's good, have you?"

"I've come for a pair of boots," said Quickshaw. "And for some thick pants and a pair of tommy's serge trousers."

"The devil you have!" Grimsby's eyebrows shot up. "Hark at that now! Boots, pants, and serge slacks! And what else can I do for you? Will you have a couple of water-carts and a double-bodied limber?"

Quickshaw grinned. "No, thank you. Those few things will be enough."

"Splendid! Will you have 'em now, or when you get 'em?"

"Now, thank you."

"Right: will you have 'em on issue or on payment?"

"What's the difference?"

"The difference is that you have 'em on issue if the Quartermaster is in a good temper, and on payment if he's got a liver."

Quickshaw immediately put his hand into his pocket, prepared to pay; at which Grimsby laughed noisily and exclaimed, "No, Father, no. I'm a sweet-tempered man at bottom. Put up thy purse into its sheath, and take thy bill and write fifty; and the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely. . . ." With these quotations he got up and went to the door. "Hallo!" he called all over the Peninsula. "Where's that bloody storeman? Find the best pair of ankle boots you've got—hallo, wait a minute!—what's that, padre? Not ankle boots? All right—No, the Church wants artillery boots and some winter pants and a good pair of serge slacks. And get the same for this other officer—I take it that's what you've come for, isn't it, sir? Nobody comes to see me unless it's to get something—and for mercy's sake, man, jump to it! Get a move on! Don't you realize the devil is making headway all the time the Church is kept waiting for trousers?"

Returning, he sat down and poured out a glass of whisky and water, and emptied it at a gulp. Apparently the drink had deranged the air in his throat, for he was obliged to make some minor adjustments there, and one major one, before he could proceed with his talk. These affairs in order, he wiped

his lips with a khaki handkerchief, and his eyes as well, and turned to Quickshaw.

"You know, sir, I quite agree with you that this swearing is no sense at all. But I can't help it. Over and above my own transport fellows, they give me these bloody Indian mule-drivers, and these Syrians, Ethiopians, Jews, Turks, Infidels, and what not, that go to make up the Zion Mule Corps. What a name for the smelly skunks, Zion Mule Corps! Spies, every one of 'em, I'll be bound; and if I'd a firing party, *I'd* send 'em to Zion."

"They're nothing of the sort; they're splendid little fellows," protested Quickshaw, who would certainly have decried them had Grimsby praised instead of attacking them. "If you did anything more than sit on your tail in this dug-out and drink whisky—if you ventured out into the open sometimes, you'd see 'em all over the Peninsula, carrying up the rations and the ammunition, and always ready with a grin when they meet you——"

"That's all Susan Adams!" interrupted Grimsby. "You try and drive them up to the Line when there's a strafe in the Gully. My crikey, if *you'd* got to get the rations through a bombardment, with nothing but Indian drivers and these Jerusalem artichoke fellers to carry 'em, *you'd* swear till you were blue. The other day I was letting 'em have it in sound English, and throwing in a bit of Hindustani as well; and I said to 'em, 'If there's any truth in the teaching of the Church of Rome, I'll get a thousand years in purgatory for this!' And just then who should I see beside me but the R.C. padre, who often comes in for a drink. So I said, 'Well, if your reverence *will* come along in your slippery, Jesuitical fashion, you must expect to hear things,' and indoors we went and had a jolly crack about the Pope. I like the R.C.s; it's these oily, teetotal, 'brothers-shall-we-now-sing-a-hymn?' United Board Methodies that I can't stand."

Evidently Grimsby thought he had better explain himself to Tony, for he turned to him and said:

"You see, sir, I've been choirboy, choirman, and choir-master now for forty-five years, and ha! ha! once I thought I'd done for myself with the vicar. It was in a choir practice, and the lad at the organ was murdering a chant—simply murdering it. Now I'm fond of music, I am, and it so got my rag out that I thought I was in the army and shouted 'Come

away from the bloody thing and let me play it.' The vicar was properly up in the gills about it, and slanged the boys like a sergeant-major because they laughed. He threatened to discharge 'em with ignominy. I was afraid for a time he'd stop me taking my Sunday Bible class—oh, yes, I've a weekly class of young men, and they get pretty honest talks from me —straight from the shoulder, I can tell you. If one of 'em gets tight or swears, he's *for* it. Absolutely *for* it. I won't have 'em swearing: one's bad enough, especially if it's the teacher. So the lad gets it; and what I used to say on the parade ground to a fellow who started off with the right foot isn't in it with what I give this poor boy. And the result is that they're a fine, upstanding group of lads. . . . And that reminds me, Father, I want something from you. I've lost my prayer-book, and I want one of your little testaments which have the psalter bound up with 'em. You see, sir"—he had turned to Tony —"when I'm feeling down, in this vile sump-hole of a place, I like to look up the psalms. Somehow I always get what I want out of them."

Quickshaw put his hand in his pocket and drew out a little khaki testament, which he tossed across to Grimsby: his action suggested, "Have it if you want it—I'm sure I don't—and now let's get on to something else." Grimsby seized the book, and was profuse in his delight.

"Give me the psalms!" he cried, opening it up. "The psalms every time! Listen: 'When Israel came out of Egypt, and the land of Judah from among a strange people.' That's the pukka tune, isn't it? Heavens, I haven't been an organist for nothing. Now here we are—very softly, please"—he conducted himself with a table knife: "'Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness: according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin'—now then, you basses!—'For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.' Yes, the basses may well sing that! Oh, it's lovely! Lovely! It makes me wish I was home again and in me surplice on Sunday evening. It's on Sunday evenings out here, sir, that I get the blues more than any other time."

The mention of Sunday evenings set them comparing their Sunday evenings in exile on this barren soil with the happy, quiet Sunday evenings at home. Grimsby drew a word-

picture of himself and his wife, whom he called "little Jimmy," and his tall daughter, "Doodles," and his small boy, "the Sergeant-Major"—all gathered round the piano singing hymns before bedtime. He imitated "the Sergeant-Major" lisping, "Now the day is over, Night is dwawing nigh"; and, somewhat excited by further noggins of whisky, insisted that Quickshaw must give his Dump an Evensong next Sunday—next Sunday afternoon as ever was. "I'll rope in the boys, Father; never you fear! Yes, that's fixed up! By jove, yes, isn't it, Father?" Quickshaw nodded his assent, and Grimsby tried to make him drink another whisky on the strength of it. "We must wet next Sunday's Evensong; come along. . . . And you, sir, too. I liked you from the first, sir, and I like you still better now you say you're a parson's son. You must come to church next Sunday and hear our service. It'll be a service worth hearing. *I'll* see to that! Damn, I'll have a choir trained between now and Sunday. But as I was saying, I like you. You've got some modesty about you—not much, but some. What I can't stand is these little twopenny-halfpenny twenty-year-old captains with one year's service, who try to lord it over us quartermasters, just because we happen to be only two-lieuts. Here am I, after forty years' service, with only two stars on my shoulders, and there's that little snipe of an Eadie with three stars, and Adjutant to the battalion. I saw him home properly the other day, when he tried to tick me off about some rations; I told him I was soldiering and in command of men while he was at his mother's breasts. I told him that he needn't think that, because he'd got one more star on his shoulder, he was God Almighty. It was a shooting matter, I know, to talk to a superior officer like that, but I risked it; and all that happened was that the lousy little brute took to sending his orders addressed, '*Hon.* Lieut. Grimsby.' Swine! But ha! ha! Father, I know now if I never knew it before, what St. Paul meant when he said that one star differeth from another star in glory. Oh, and I must tell you this"—they had got up to go. "I must just tell you this: some time ago I had him properly. He rang me up and told me I must send up rations for two hundred because a new draft had just come in. So I said, 'Ring off, my lad, ring off; you're on the wrong number'; so he said, 'Why, isn't that the 15th R.W.E. Dump?' and I said, 'Yes, but you ring off and get on to the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Blest

Redeemer fed five thousand men with enough rations for ten, but I ain't acquired His skill yet.' "

It was difficult to get away, so talkative had Grimsby become At the door of the dug-out he must begin to expound to Quickshaw his own ideas of what a pukka chaplain should be. " The parson oughtn't to go among the men so that they're terrified lest he's going to say ' Let us pray ' at any minute. What he wants to do is to barge into their tent and greet 'em, ' Hallo, boys, damn your eyes, all, and how the devil are you ? ' Then he'll begin to make headway with them. You take my word for it ; I'm an old soldier and I know. . . . Well, good-bye, sir ; you mustn't mind me and my talk. The Father here understands me. Don't forget Sunday."

That Sunday Evensong at Grimsby's Dump ! Tony never forgot it. He walked to it with Quickshaw, who expressed all the way his suspicions that it was more likely to be a choir practice conducted by the Quartermaster than a service conducted by him, and that he wasn't going to stand it. No, he wasn't going to fall for that sort of thing. Sometimes Grimsby was too much of a good thing altogether. " I'll put a stop to any nonsense at once. In a church service the padre's in command no matter if a Field-Marshal himself is present."

And when they arrived there was everything to strengthen his suspicion. All the transport men, and a crowd of visitors from other settlements in the Gully, were there in a military semi-circle around the tall figure of Grimsby, who was conducting a last dress-rehearsal of the hymns. Heaven knows what mixture of exhortation and frightfulness he had employed to induce among such a number of men this godly disposition to worship. It looked as if even the Zionists had been impressed into the congregation to swell its proportions. Wandsworth, the Quartermaster's batman, had been entrusted with the distribution of the hymn-books, and the voice of his master could be heard goading him into expeditious movement.

" Now then, O.C. Hymn Books, get a move on. Here are half a dozen chaps picking their teeth and waiting for hymn-books. Hustle 'em about. We're feeling very pious just now, but we can't keep it up all night. It's rather a strain on some of these fellows. Ah, here's the father ! They've all got hymn-books now, padre. We're going to open with ' Abide with Me.' You don't mind, do you ? It's number one in the book, boys. I'll lead off."

The hymn started, and the Quartermaster controlled it splendidly, his fine voice (of which he was obviously proud) leading the congregation, and his walking-stick enforcing now a *pianissimo*, now a *fortissimo* effect.

When the hymn was over, Tony supposed that Grimsby would step aside and yield the floor to Quickshaw. But not so. During the last verse Grimsby had turned back in his little Army hymn-book to the form of Evening Prayer; and directly the Amen had faded away, he suggested a General Confession with the words, "Now, boys, suppose we tell the Almighty we're a blooming lot of rotters. It's not far from the truth. You'll find it on page ten."

During the resulting Confession Tony, a clergyman's son, began to suffer a great trepidation lest the Quartermaster should pronounce the Absolution, which was printed next. But it was the Absolution that saved the day. Grimsby was too good a churchman not to know that, for this incident at least, he must hand over the parade to the chaplain. And Quickshaw, having entered into possession, did not allow himself to be shouldered out again. Throughout the remainder of the service Grimsby became merely the loudest voice in the congregation and the foreman of the jury when the padre asked, "What hymn shall we have next?" It was not until Quickshaw had concluded his sermon and given the Benediction that the Quartermaster could take up the reins once more. Then, as if loth to see this magnificent congregation disperse, he stepped forward and addressed it. He was going to propose, he said, a vote of thanks to the parson for coming and giving them a service. But his speech quickly left this secular ground; it put on pious clothes, went to church, and became a sermon. All knew that they were back in the service again when he got in a well-meant but rather back-handed compliment to Quickshaw. "These blinking shells," he said, "are the best sermon we've had to-day. One of them going off like the Judgment Day ten paces to your rear will do more to put the fear of God into you than all the dear padre's sermons put together. Now, boys, the one redeeming feature——"

The sweat stood on Tony's brow as Grimsby dropped into this phrase. He was for ever employing it without any thought as to what it meant. On his lips it stood for "the best thing about," and sometimes the results of this misuse were appalling; as now:

"The one redeeming feature of the padre's sermon was the way in which he dwelt upon the manhood of our blessed Lord, and how He knew what suffering was and the temptation to be afraid. Now, if I get the wind up when one of these five-nine's comes along, I want to ask the Almighty, don't I, for sufficient guts to put a brave face on the matter. Now, boys, what would be the use of my asking Him for strength if I didn't know that He knew exactly what I was feeling like, because He'd been through much the same Himself? No, take it from me, lads, the one redeeming feature about our blessed Lord was that He was a man like ourselves——"

Tony went cold, but the orator, meaning nothing but good, pursued his way.

"Frankly, boys, I'm sorry for any lad on this hell of a Peninsula who isn't a Christian. It seems to me he's walking about dam-near the devil's wire without equipment or rations. I recommend you all to indent on the padre for a pukka Christian outfit. He's got the goods, you know. I'd have you all confirmed and going regular to his Holy Communion. Now shall I tell you how the Holy Communion strikes me? I'm married, you know, and my wife, whom I call 'little Jimmy,' is a good Christian woman. Well, she went last Sunday to her Holy Communion, in our parish church at home, and of course she went at eight o'clock in the morning. So I went off at about ten o'clock to where the dear old padre here was having one of his Communion services in this confounded Gully—because I reckon that what's ten o'clock in the Gully is eight o'clock in Thames-mouth. So there we were, little Jimmy and me, both at it together, for all practical purposes. I tell you straight, boys, it's only when I'm kneeling at the padre's little altar here that I feel really close to little Jimmy—almost as if she were kneeling at my side. Yes, to my mind that's the one redeeming feature about the Holy Communion. . . . By gosh, we hear a lot about the Communion of Saints, but I tell you, the Communion of Saints isn't in it, sometimes, with me and my Jimmy. . . '

CHAPTER IX

WAVE TO HELLES

THE fear darkened over Gallipoli. New guns on Achi Baba were pounding the beaches; more and faster and larger aeroplanes were flying over the lines of communication, and flying daringly low, as if Germans sat at their joy-sticks; heavier shells and bombs were falling everywhere, on plateau, ravine, and nullah. The Germans had come. They had blasted their road through Serbia and joined up with the Turks, bringing new guns, new ammunition, new men, and a new heart. And there was little response on those edges of the Peninsula where the British invaders lay: no reinforcements came to them, nor rumour that they were to move forward or to move back; and meanwhile Winter tossed up the seas behind, and their jetties broke. They lay there, believing that either the move forward or the move back was impossible. What would happen, who should say? They shrugged their shoulders.

December was half-way through when Scrase came to Tony, possessed of a secret story.

"Hush, not a word, Bungay! not a word! There's to be an advance."

"An advance!" exclaimed Tony. "It's imposs., old man, absolutely imposs.: we haven't the men."

"Nevertheless, in about five days from now, we're going to put up a hell of a show."

Tony stared at him, and saw that he was speaking the truth.

"Honour bright?" he asked.

"Yum."

A tremor, not of fear but of exultation, rushed up Tony and lifted his breast. There was that in him, as he had often confessed, which defied his brain and delighted in war. And we know, moreover, that this boy who, in his theories at least, could climb to unworldly heights and detach himself

from men's praise or blame, was really possessed by an ambition to perform some prodigious gallantry which should earn him the plaudits of an army. And he believed he could do it; his irrational exultation would sweep him forward. And then his men would rejoice in him; and Honor would hear of it; and Keatings and Derek in France. So far he had been given no opportunity. He had conducted his men on dangerous midnight fatigues and borne himself well; which had not been difficult for him because his excitement was always greater than his fear; but these had brought him no special glory—had not every other officer done the like? He had led one reconnaissance raid, but it had been a dull affair; the Turk had declined to wake up and invest the raid with bullets and glory. Sometimes he had thought of imitating Hughes Anson's escapades, but, so sensitive was he in reality to the opinions of men, he feared to be called a "copy cat." *Now*, though; *now* the hour had come; the 15th Royal West Essex should see what he could do!

Such were the visions that flashed upon his mind as he heard Kit Scrase's news; but all he said was: "I suppose the idea is that, if we've got to be scuppered, we may as well sell our lives as dearly as possible."

"Perhaps," nodded Scrase. "And they're going to do something at Suvla too; and there's talk of the monitors trying to rush the Narrows. But, for the love of Mike, say nothing about it. No one's supposed to know."

"Right-ho. Shush, everybody."

Scrase had hardly left him to his excited thoughts before Joe Wylie came up the slope, bringing a very knowing look.

"Mr. Scrase bin talking abaht this 'ere attack, I s'pose, sir?" he asked.

"What do *you* know about it?"

"Law love yer; they're talking abaht it in every trench. It's in four or five days' time, they say, and the Navy's going to 'ave a shot at getting them monitors through the Narrers. And I reckon it's all dam-silly—meself."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, even if we take a trench or two, we ain't got the men to follow up. Reckon they want to kill us all awf, before the end, so's to save our fares back. However, let's git on with it." Joe began to busy himself about the dug-out. "What Teacher says goes."

A few minutes later came Moulden down the track of Leigh Ravine, returning from Battalion Headquarters. He stopped, and his deep-set eyes looked into Tony's.

"Well, O'Grogan," he began significantly. "I suppose you wish now that your Indian Army papers had gone through—really?"

Moulden was one of those people whose eyes looked straight and long into yours—only too straight and too long—as if they were doing it deliberately lest you should call them shifty-eyed. He would even make his glance tremble with friendliness as he fixed it on you. But you were not deluded; you could feel, though you could not see, another man hidden behind his eyes, and him a lonely soul, busy with clandestine thoughts. Tony had never felt this secreted watcher quite so clearly as to-day when Moulden said, "I suppose you wish that your Indian Army papers had gone through." He stared back and snapped, "No! Thank you very much, Moulden, but I don't."

Moulden sensed the hostility and tried to blow it away on a laugh.

"Well, *I* should, if I were you. I mean to say: given half a chance I'd take the first boat and put a hundred miles between myself and W beach."

"Well, I shouldn't, you see," Tony snapped.

"No?" Moulden laughed, determined to be friendly. "I'm only quoting what you used to say—really. You used to say, 'Three months on this foul spot is three months too long.'"

"We say a lot of dam-silly things."

Moulden turned his face away.

"Well, I don't know. Put it like this: they may be jokes to you, but they're just about the truth to me. I never was the 'little hero.' Do you think that if I volunteered, they'd give me a job as Burial Officer in Alex.? That's more my line—really."

Words leapt to Tony's lips: "I should drop that attitude, Moulden; it sits well on most of the other fellows, but somehow it doesn't fit you;" but he held them back.

"I wonder what came of those papers, though—really," continued Moulden. "I mean: it's months since you sent 'em in, isn't it?"

"I really forget," said Tony shortly. "Anyhow they don't interest me now. And I say, do you mind if I push off, Moulden? I've something rather important to do——"

"No, not at all, not at all," Moulden laughed. "I always like to see keenness. But here!—wait a jiffy—you're not going to Battalion Headquarters by any chance, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—really."

"I'm going to the trenches."

"The trenches. Pooh! no accounting for tastes. Well, so long, Bungay; trust in God and keep your head down."

"So long."

Tony was not going to the trenches. He wanted to walk about with his hands in his pockets, and indulge the excitement within him. Quickly he made his way to the summit of Y Ravine, and then strolled along a lofty track that led to the peace of the Eski Line. Wasn't it strange that he couldn't feel fear, but only exultation? He had a presentiment—"an absolute presentiment"—that he would come through the attack alive; and, rational or not, he trusted the presentiment. Never had he known so strong a conviction; it assured him and assured him that, this time next week, his fine deed would be done and himself be alive to enjoy its fame. He imagined his mother, Honor, and Peggy hearing of his success, and old Keatings making fun of it in France, and pompous old Derek bragging about it. He recalled the boys of Stratton Lye, scattered over all the war's fronts, and pictured them reading in their papers of an award to 2nd Lieut. A. O'Grogan and guessing that it was their old master. His fingers even felt the spot on his jacket above the left breast-pocket, where a ribbon would go; and in his mind's eye he saw the ribbon in place—the purple and white of the M.C., or perhaps the cardinal and blue of the D.S.O., or even the deep crimson—but no! this last was hoping too much. And he was quite ready to do without the ribbon, so the reputation was his! Yes: that was the truth; he could say it honestly.

Back on his traces. He was all aglow and must write to Honor. Moulden would be out of the way now, and he could be alone in his dug-out. His pace quickened, and he was almost running as he turned out of the Mule Trench into Leigh Ravine. Art Webster, a cigarette behind his ear, was washing Moulden's socks in front of a dug-out and greeted him with:

"Adjutant's Orderly come for you while you was away, sir."

"What? A message?"

"Yussir. Mr. Moulden said you was in the trenches, so e's gawn there."

"Do you know what it was about?"

"No, sir. Some order about this 'ere attack, I expect, sir. Not that we know anything abaht it, mind yer." And Art Webster winked as his master, Joe Wylie, might have done; but he could not wink with such an air as Joe Wylie.

"Did he say if it were urgent?"

"Yussir. You got to sign for it."

"Good! I'll go and find him."

Ah, didn't this suggest that his presentiment was already shaping into fact? Doubtless this order meant that he was to be given some particular task in the attack. His imagination could not surmise what that task might be, but he hurried towards it joyously. He met the battalion runner in the communication trench returning from his bootless visit to the Line. The man saluted and presented the message. With a hand that shook a little, Tony took it and read.

He read that 2nd Lieut. O'Grogan, C Company, was to leave the Peninsula at once and report to Lemnos for further instructions. He would be struck off the ration strength of the battalion as from to-morrow.

He nearly cried with anger and helplessness. His papers had dawdled along the Mediterranean, and dawdled back again, and chosen to arrive at this, of all hapless hours. It was a cruel, dastardly trick that Chance had played him. If he were to slip off the Peninsula now—oh, it defeated thought. To think what the Brigade would say, what the men of the 15th would say—damn! to think of it stayed the action of the heart. And of course! yes, of course! that blighter, that utter wrong 'un, Moulden, had picked up this news this morning at the Battalion Orderly Room. Probably he had swung his eavesdropping eyes over the papers on the Adjutant's table. Had he not mentioned Battalion Headquarters? Oh yes, he had known all about it when he spoke. Why, the man wasn't even clever in his double-faced dealing; a half-wit could see through it. And, my God! let him but begin to suggest—as he would for sure—that O'Grogan was leaving the Peninsula to escape the final disaster, and—but no, no, no! he mustn't have the chance; he mustn't have the chance!

Tony hurried to Colonel Tappiter and begged that the order

might be countermanded. Useless. Orders were orders; and this order had trickled down to Gallipoli from God knew what eminence; the War Office itself probably.

Then would the Colonel always believe that he had not wanted to go; not now; not at such an hour as this.

Colonel Tappiter looked at the distressed young officer and nodded.

"Yes, O'Grogan. Dammit, yes. I think you made an idiot of yourself in taking any notice of that bloody-fool order about the Indian Army. What the hell's Mespot compared with Gallipoli? One's a stroke of genius and the other's a—a—the other isn't. It's—it's second-rate stuff."

"But Gallipoli's a wash-out now, isn't it, sir?"

"Who the devil said so?" The Colonel heated at once, as if a favourite possession had been lightly touched. "Aren't we going to—no, I beg your pardon—that's secret."

"Do you mean the attack in a few days' time, sir? I've heard talk about it."

"Then you shouldn't have done. . . . Well, at least that means we're not going to quit."

"Does it, sir?" Tony could feel that the Colonel was defeating any black hints of evacuation by calling them white.

"Of course it does. *Quit?* No! As Hamilton said, it's unthinkable.

"But what can we do, sir, with so few men?"

"If we all believed in this show as it deserves to be believed in, and—er—and if we all knew for certain that the rotters at home were going to support us through thick and thin, by God we'd do it! The Turk has no real heart for fighting us. Anyone can see that. Let 'em give us another division or two, and we'd do it yet. And perhaps that's what they're up to."

"Oh, sir, I wish I could stay!"

"So do I. There's no spot like this. Let us have one more shot now, and if we can't get through because of all these millions of Germans, well, we can dig in, can't we, and stand a siege here? We'd hold 'em. It's December now, and in April we could attack 'em again. I've no use for being beaten after taking three knocks. It's not our usual style, either. They didn't ask the fellows to take the count at Mons, so why should they ask us to do it here? The men'll get up and go on—I'll answer for that! It's only the wind-bags at

home who'll call the fight off. . . . Orderly! Tell Goodrich to come here. I'm going round the trenches."

He had forgotten Tony and his trouble.

So Tony spent the remainder of that day saying good-bye to his friends. Scrase and Hughes Anson no doubt believed his protestations of regret, but they said little beyond congratulating him on his escape and asking him to kiss their relations for them and tell them that they died bravely. "Tell 'em," said Hughes, "that you last saw us fighting 'one to three, with our faces to Achi Baba and our behinds to the sea' —will you tell 'em that?" Tony said he would. "Well, good-bye then, Bungay," Hughes concluded, "so sorry you can't stop, and thank you for calling." Scrase proffered no word of sadness at the loss of his friend; it was not in his nature to do so. He shook hands and said, "Good-bye, Bungay."

With officers of other companies, and other battalions in the Brigade, he was not sure how he stood. They chaffed him; but one or two of them, he imagined, were hiding their own thoughts behind their chaff; and he felt that his embarrassed, unasked explanations were sounding wordy and disingenuous.

Moulden was the only one who studied to be consolatory: "Now look here, O'Grogan, I know what you're thinking, and I know we haven't hit it off together as well as we might have done—really—but I should like to say this: if ever anybody suggests that you engineered your departure because you didn't like the look of things on the Peninsula, I shall tell 'em that they know nothing about you—see? I mean to say: put it like this: I shall tell 'em, if you don't mind, that you and I weren't exactly cousins in love with each other—really—but that's not to say I didn't admire your courage and all that—see? I know what you must be feeling. It's real bad luck—it is—honestly."

"Oh well, cut that out." Tony said it with a smile, though thinking the silence of the other officers preferable to the words of Moulden.

"That's right!" Moulden agreed. "But you understand what I mean, don't you?"

In the faces of his men when he bade them farewell there was no hint of unspoken censure. They were sincerely sorry to see the last of him, and that was all. But the censure

would come, he knew. He had read the army well enough to know that a lying tale of his having abandoned his regiment in its hour of peril would first be whispered among the indolent officers of the Brigade and then would gain its currency and gradually percolate down to the men. It twisted his heart to think of Fred Roberts and Jim Stott and "Little Willie" Sparrow hearing such a murmur against him and haply believing it; or to picture Ernie Botten returning to Twineham after the war and carrying into its lanes and fields this rumour of Lieutenant O'Grogan's "cold feet." Oh, it was awful—sickening—to contemplate!

Fred Roberts and his young brother Dicky were the first of these men that he found in the trench bays. Not this time was Fred grumbling, but sitting on the fire-step and staring sadly and glumly out of those bewildered eyes of his—those "hospital eyes" which accepted all things but did not understand.

"I've got to leave you, Roberts," said he.

"Go on, sir!" Roberts was incredulous.

"Yes. I've been ordered to report at Mudros so as to be sent to India or somewhere."

"Go on, sir!" Then Roberts grinned. "You won't be wantin' a seckiterry, will yer, sir, 'cos if so, I'm ready. I'm jest about fed up with this place too, sir."

"'Fraid not, Roberts. . . . Besides *I'm* not fed up with it," added Tony, for the "too" had hurt him. "At least I am, suppose: but I never wanted to go and leave you all."

Was there any sense in excusing himself like this, or was he only putting the seeds of an idea into the man's head?

"Well, the boys'll be real sorry, I guess, sir. They took to you, sir, if I may say so."

"Yes, I don't want to go," repeated Tony rather feebly. "Just as I was getting to know you all."

"No, sir."

"Well . . ." Dammit, what was one to say? "Good luck to you then."

"Thank you, sir. And to *you*, sir."

That was all with Fred Roberts. Next, Jim Stott.

"Good-bye, Jim."

The big fellow stared at Tony and at his outstretched hand.

"Art tha leaving us then, sir?"

"Yes."

"Why, it seems you only coom t'other week."

"Yes, yes, but I can't help it. I've got my orders to quit."

"Soom of us have all the luck, sir."

That stab at his heart again! Was the man hinting that——

"How do you mean?"

"Happen you've heard summat about this attack, sir?"

"Of course I have, and that's why I'm worried about leaving you all." No. Good old Jim Stott had meant nothing; the words had been innocent and humorous. "I'd rather be staying with the Battalion."

"Bah goom, *Ah* wouldn't, sir! Give me the chance to hook it and Ah'd be taking it all reet . . . eh, and oot th'army too and all—no mistake. Ah reckon nothing to soldiering as a way of spending me time, sir."

"But you don't do it too badly all the same, Jim."

"Well," Jim drawled apologetically, "Ah'm sweatin' on getting me stripes, sir; that's all. Get a bit more pay that road, tha knows."

"Well, I hope you get them, Jim."

"Thank you, sir. And Ah hope they make you a colonel."

"And keep the Turk out of this trench after I've gone."

"Aye, sir, you bet! Kill me own blooming faythe if he coom into *this* trench."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye, sir. I'll 'appen meet you again soomwhere."

And Ernie Botten. "Good-bye, Botten. Perhaps we shall see each other next at Twineham." Deep thought behind Ernie Botten's eyes as he examined this proposition. "Yes, zur, we might that." Then "Little Willie" Sparrow: and about his sorrow there could be no dispute. "I'm off, Willie," said Tony; and Willie's instant reply was, "Oh *no*, sir!" A real pain rang in that "Oh *no*."

There yet remained Joe Wylie to be told, and certainly the ethics of departure didn't trouble him at all.

"Wylie," said Tony, "how would you like to leave the Peninsula to-night?"

"Gawd, sir! Wodjer say?"

"How would you like to leave the Peninsula to-night?"

Joe stared. "If you're pulling me leg, sir, Gawd forgive yer!"

"I've got to go to Lemnos, would you care to come too?"

Joe looked profoundly knowing. "*Would* I, sir? Would a bloater like a swim?"

"I think I can wangle it. You're getting on in years, aren't you?"

"Jest on fifty, sir; and never broken a plate."

"Well, they'll let you come, I expect."

Just then a machine-gun rattled crisply and some of its bullets whirred overhead. Joe turned towards the sound.

"Johnny's doing two hundred words a minute on that there typewriter of his. Yussir, *I'll* come along of you if I can—not 'arf I won't. This place's no longer safe. Are you leaving the Battalion for good, sir?"

"'Fraid so. Don't want to, but there it is. Unless"—a sudden idea had seized Tony—"I can get back to it."

The machine-gun rattled again; rattled more angrily, it seemed.

"Well, nah," said Joe, facing the Turkish army and addressing it, "that's torn it. That's put the lid on it. You've driven me away, Johnny, and I hope yer satisfied. And I don't expect your father married your mother, neither. . . . Well, I guess I'll be packing the kit now, shell I, sir?"

"Please."

"And me own, sir?" There was appeal in Wylie's tone.

"I'll let you know."

"Gawd, sir, if you could wangle it. . . ."

And that night, Tony, in his British Warm and with his pack on his back, climbed alone up the foot-track of Leigh Ravine; for Joe Wylie had gone ahead with the heavy baggage. At the top, just before the track passed through a cutting into the Mule Trench, he turned round and looked back on the two infolding bluffs with their arc of beach below. The sigh of the sea drifted up to him (for the sea was murmuring there that night, as it had murmured during all the years before the British came, and would murmur for all years after; as it is murmuring now). Behind him the Turks were firing in their desultory fashion, but with heavier stuff than usual; and he remembered that he was looking down upon a doomed ravine. He was surprised that such an empty little place, patched only with scrub and holding neither house nor garden of man's construction, but only here and there a few holes called dug-outs, could hurt in the moment of farewell like a place beloved. He could hardly turn away from it. He tried to imagine it ten and twenty years on, and it seemed to him that all these ravines of Gallipoli, dropping from the

uplands down to the sea, were not unlike the Norse gorges; places very apt for heroic legends such as the sagamen told and the scalds. Already for him who was leaving them for ever, they were passing into the westward light of romance. He gave to Leigh Ravine his last look and turned and walked sadly along the Mule Trench till it dropped down a steep slope and opened on to that great canyon, the Gully Ravine. And here again he must turn round and say good-bye to the opening of the Mule Trench, which had led upwards to the firing line, and to danger, and to good friends.

Then on to Brigade Headquarters, down the Gully.

At V Beach he found Joe Wylie sitting on his heavy baggage; and together they went for instructions to the *River Clyde*, where the M.L.O. had his headquarters. The Turkish gun, "Asiatic Annie," was shelling V Beach with "coal-boxes" tossed from the other side of the Straits; and two jagged holes in the bows of the *Clyde* and many large craters on the beach showed where her shells had bitten home. And the M.L.O. teased their impatience by doubting if they would get off that night. Tony was anxious to be gone; and as for Joe Wylie, who could hardly believe in his good fortune, he kept up a laughing worry lest the plum so long desired should be drawn out of his reach by a sudden counter-ordering of his departure, or by his destruction under a shell from Asia or a bomb from the Taubes overhead.

They were passed to the M.L.O. on W Beach, who stated that he could get them on to the *Snaefell*, which was leaving No. 2 pier at eleven that night. So till then they hung about the hillside in the darkness. The darkness was full of movement. Many units were drawing their rations from the stores on W Beach; and it was no happiness to Tony to watch the limbers drawn by the mounted English, the gharries driven by the squatting turbanned Indians, and the pack mules led by the silent Zionists, as they toiled through the ploughed and churned-up mud, away on to the table-land and out of hearing, going up to the men whom he had left.

It was not until after midnight that the *Snaefell*, with Tony and Joe Wylie aboard, drew away from the Peninsula. Why should such a movement clutch at a man's heart? They were

a little way at sea now, and the ravines and gorges of Gallipoli, enlarged by night, seemed to break from a forbidding height down to their gloom-filled coves. He watched the hurricane lanterns moving on the beaches, and the star-shells playing over the distant trenches; and he thought of the patient men there staying out a campaign that drew near to dying. Under those star-shells were the lads of his platoon, and Scrase and Hughes Anson and the Colonel, still hoping, still waiting for the end, whatever it might be, as they had waited for long months under the death that flew by night and the pestilence that walked in the noon-day. Now the lights could be hardly seen: they were pin-pricks in the distances of the dark. He clung to them desperately—but they were gone; swallowed up by night and by time; and Gallipoli was no more than memory could paint. And his memory painted it for him as his eyes had seen it last: a plateau ending in austere cliffs, where ravines and gorges broke down to the sea; a place very apt for heroic tales, such as the sagamen told and the scalds.

CHAPTER X

IN AND OUT OF LEMNOS

ON a map the Island of Lemnos looks like a decayed old molar tooth, which, with its middle all eaten away, had become two teeth instead of one. And the cavity up the centre of the molar is all that the map can tell you of Lemnos' principal glory: its great "Lemnos Harbour"—or "Mudros Harbour," as we always knew it, because of the two villages on its either side, Mudros East and Mudros West, and of all that we suffered there. Mudros Harbour is one of the grand harbours of the world. It is a gulf of still sea, encircled by hills, of which some are low and rounded and others lofty and peaked. So deep is the enclosed water that there can anchor between its embracing hills gigantic liners for which Alexandria and Port Said will never cater. There are many cups in those hills; but as a bath is bigger than a cup, so much bigger is the depression that holds the Gulf of Mudros. This harbour needs no breakwaters, for the surrounding ranges nearly meet at its opening; and even here Nature has detailed two little islands to keep their sentry stations for ever.

In the days of the Dardanelles Fight, if anyone had wanted to obtain in a single glance a conception of the vast and varied demands of the campaign, he should have shipped himself to Mudros Harbour. For the whole Merchant Service of Britain and half the Navy seemed to be anchored in the gulf, to say nothing of French warships, Italian warships, Greek vessels and tank-boats bringing water from Alexandria; and on all the hills around, like browsing sheep, were the white tents of rest camps and hospitals and stores, British, Australian, Indian and French. So full was the harbour of shipping that the water was fouled for bathers, unless they were game to swim

through the off-scourings of the ships: sodden loaves, joints of meat, garbage, and floating films of grease and oil that presented prismatic colours to the sky; but generally, in the summer heat, the tommies were more than game for this experience and added to the objects that littered the harbour their shouting shoals of naked men.

You went ashore; and as you climbed the hill, treading in nothing but dust where, before the tramping of the thousand-footed armies, had once been fields of grain, you passed on your right a great canvas hospital. It was formed of long rows of square Indian-pattern tents, each of which was a ward containing six or eight cots. The avenues between these white wards were as rigidly straight as a *route nationale*, and their severity was further defined by all the tent pegs being painted a staring white. The rectangular area of the hospital was marked off by a border of big stones also painted white; and over all, on a tall mast and in the high Mudros wind, beat the Union Jack and the Red Cross.

Having passed the seaward front of this hospital, you reached a low hill's summit; and here were four windmills whose bodies, built of local mud and stone, were shaped like round towers, and whose sails were laced to the framework of a large wheel. Since the armies came and trampled down the corn-fields, these mills had been idle; two were falling into ruin, and one was occupied by an enterprising Greek as a "Hair Dressing Saloon for the Brave Armies of the Allies." Mills on this model were so much the outstanding feature of the bleak landscape, that to-day, if we close our eyes and try to recreate old Lemnos, we see always the heaving summits ridden by their round-towered, wheel-winged mills.

Standing by the hair-dressing saloon, and looking down the further slope, you saw another hospital, No. 1 Australian, arranged in similar lines; and beyond this, a large French camp plentifully stocked with barrels of wine and supplied with a big bakery, from which arose the grateful smell of French loaves; and behind the French settlement, rambling round the foot of the hill, the little village of Mudros East.

This Lemnos was a happy hunting-ground for insects. Flies battened on the sick men in the wards, centipedes climbed up the sides of the bell-tents, locusts leapt about the world outside, and the praying mantis prayed upon his bush and caught flies between his devotions. And ants: you could

sit in your tent and watch a pair of ants with great bullet-heads and legs as long as spiders' contesting a point at issue, first by a round of fisticuffs and then by a wrestling bout, while others of the tribe were shop-lifting portions of the floor-matting and carrying them to their homes. And perky little lizards stared up at you and hoped you thought they were crocodiles.

But that was in the dusty summer months. When Tony O'Grogan came to Lemnos its inhabitants were fighting the rain; deep trenches were dug all round the tents to draw off the water, metalled roads were being laid by Turkish prisoners and imported Egyptian coolies, and daily the hills echoed to the blasting of the Engineers, who were finding the stone for the roads.

In Lemnos the hills were the seats of the audience, and the water was the theatre of events. By the rapidity with which the tidings, "The *Mauretania*'s coming in," or "The *Aquitania*'s anchored," overspread the camps and drew all men to their tent doors, you could plumb the monotony of the land. Little else was discussed: we knew all about the submarines which had threatened this particular vessel, and the skilful way she had evaded them; the number of troops aboard her and her final destination. And by our envy of those high officers who would go aboard her to-night and dine in her lavish saloon, you could plumb our weariness of the dusty Mudros meats. You should have been there that day when a murmur of admiration and amazement arose from the Mudros hills as the *Mauretania*, no longer a black transport, entered the harbour in the white paint and the green sash of a hospital ship. Oh, how lovely she was, and what—*what* did this change portend? Or you should have been there that evening when the old *Southland*, with a jagged hole in her bows, came limping into harbour at the pace of an old man's walk.

The news of her nearness had been conveyed to the hills by a racing rumour: "The *Southland* with twelve hundred Australians aboard has been torpedoed and is going down twenty miles from Lemnos." This ugly story was confirmed by a snort from a French destroyer which lit out of the harbour at thirty odd knots. The snort was a "halloo" to the other sea-hounds, who slipped their leashes and sped away on the scent sniffed up by the destroyer. They had gone to pick up the survivors. The harbour, you can be sure, waited to witness

their return. Small rowing boats and gay Greek yachts were in big demand by the military, who desired to drift about the boom and give a cheer, when the time should come, to rescuers and rescued. First home and first to draw the cheers was the French destroyer, whose tiny decks were massed with Australian infantry. Then to the harbour and the hills was given the story of what had happened twenty miles out at sea. The torpedo, striking the *Southland*, blew a hole in her bows thirty foot long, killing in the explosion a small tale of men. She began to settle rapidly. The Australians, usually the most unruly army of dare-devils that ever enjoyed a war, this time tried perfect discipline for a change; and in the absence of all panic they were easily distributed into the lifeboats, which, taking to the sea, lay by to watch the *Southland* sink. But the Captain and the others who remained aboard decided that with a big effort they might yet force the old ship into harbour and beach her somewhere and save her. Exulting in the decision, for a ship is a lovable thing, they called to the boats for volunteers who would accept the risks of her stoke-holds and see about getting her safely into port. Among the Australians hearing this there was a fight for precedence; and now at the time these details were being told to Lemnos the selected volunteers were stoking up below the water-line and forcing the vessel onwards at three miles an hour. Now the harbour was more excited to welcome the *Southland* herself than to watch the coming of the rescue ships. They waited and they waited—for three miles an hour is slow going. But the moment came when she rounded the islands at the mouth of the harbour, moving more slowly than the moon as it rises behind the hill; and she came on, dragging herself into safety; and there were some men watching who said afterwards that, although they had intended to cheer with the loudest, their throats were too full to do it, as they saw this splendid laggard, with the jagged wound in her bows, creeping into harbour at the pace of an old man's walk.

Lemnos had watched too, with wonderful feelings, the submarine E 11, after its impudent enterprises in the Sea of Marmora, come slipping in, like a shark's fin, a streak upon the water, with its crew unkempt and dishevelled upon its deck. These men were acknowledging the ovation given them by the crews paraded for that happy purpose on all the warships through which the submarine passed. Everyone knew that

something out of the ordinary was happening in the harbour that afternoon when the E 11 came shyly within the boom.

And one early morning the *Snaefell* came into harbour, bringing Tony O'Grogan and Joe Wylie his batman. And the first thing they remarked, when the sunlight had come into harbour too, was the great number of hospital ships assembled, and the significant fact that they were all empty. "Blimey, they don't half expect some casu*ali*-ties," said Joe. "I reckon we left the Peninsula at just abaht the right time, sir." And on the good ship *Aragon*, where Tony reported as to his Headquarters, he found an "eve-of-the-battle" activity; there was an indefinable excitement in its offices and alleyways; and, as a result, the shortest measure for him. "No time to worry about you," was the tone that met him. 'More important things on hand. Go to a rest camp and wait." So ashore went Tony and Joe to a rest camp, where they had nothing to do for days except to wander over the island and gather rumours about the movements on the Peninsula. Strolling along the lines of the hospitals, Tony observed that all their wards, as far as possible, were empty. On a level floor between the hills he came upon a newly-erected camp of bell-tents, and they stood there, *empty*. Flapping in the wind, they waited.

It was on a Saturday night that the smaller of the troopships went out, and some warships with them; and in the morning some of the hospital ships followed. . . . And all that day the murmur of heavy guns on Gallipoli troubled the Lemnos air. By night the truth was out; the whole of the army at Suvla and Anzac had been drawn off the Peninsula, while the army at Helles had attacked all along its line, to hold the Turks in front of it. In the wake of this news came the Suvla army itself in trawlers and destroyers and barges; and the waiting camps received it. Astonishingly few casualties came in the hospital ships and they were nearly all from Helles. Apparently the Suvla-Anzac evacuation had taken the enemy by surprise, and been concluded to its last man before the Turks bestirred themselves to worry it.

But Helles? What of Helles now? What would happen there? The Helles army couldn't be brought in off this easy

style, now that the all-important element of surprise had gone. Kit Scrase . . . Rosy Hughes . . . Quickshaw . . . were they still alive? And all the boys of Tony's Company; how many of them were going underground this morning? Oh damn and damn and damn! To think that he had slipped away just before a battle! And just before Helles became the most dangerous spot in the world; for such it was now, when all the Turkish regiments and guns which had held the Suvla-Anzac lines were moving southward to their task of destroying the British who were still ashore. Ah, wait! if of his own free will he were to go back to his regiment at once while the threat of destruction was still over it, he would prove that it was not funk which had scuttled him off to Lemnos. Yes, that was it; that was what he must do, he must get back at once. But the *Aragon* said "No!" It was a curt "No," and heavy with a secret; it sounded rather like, "By God, no! We don't want to send any more men to Helles for the Turks to imprison or slaughter." Or perhaps, "Fool! aren't we going to have trouble enough in evacuating those who are there without sending any more?" No, let Lieutenant O'Grogan go back to his rest camp and await further orders.

So Tony stayed in his tent, not sulking like Achilles, for his outward fashion, as with all in those days who had secret pains to cover, was merriment; but the worm was eating at his heart. There was little that was noble in his anxiety, as he perfectly well perceived; it was less an eagerness to die with his friends (though this heroic spice was not entirely missing) than a boy's fear of being thought a coward and of being spoken of unkindly behind his back. Tony, who had imagined that in the war he would escape his excessive "personalness," was now feeling about as personal as ever in his life.

With this for his mood he was standing one forenoon near the Red Cross stores piled by the Egyptian Pier, when whom should he descry among them but Padre Quickshaw? The padre, looking not a bit more like a chaplain than usual, was pointing out to a Red Cross civilian—and doing it rather pettishly—such stores as he desired for himself and certainly intended to have. Tony ran towards him, thirsty for news, and loudly hailed him: "What ho, padre! Padre dear! What the deuce are you doing *here?*"

Quickshaw, glancing up, gave him that incipient grin which

was all that ever got past the settled resentment in his eyes and on his mouth; and explained that since it looked as if they were going to stay for ever on Helles, he had come in search of whisky and marmalade for the Brigadier and—what was vastly more important, to his thinking—Christmas comforts for the men.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Tony, and walked him back for lunch at the rest camp; and while the meal delayed its approach, he sat him in his tent and plied him with questions. How had the Royal West Essex fared in the attack, and what had it all been about?

Oh, the attack at Helles was to cover the evacuation of Suvla, of course. It had been launched on December 19th, just before the Suvla army did a guy.

And how was everybody after it?

Well, Scrase and Moulden and the rest were all right, and Hughes Anson had only a flesh wound, but eighteen men of C Company had been killed, including two of Tony's own platoon.

"Not——?"

"No, none of your pets," said Quickshaw, rather contemptuously. "Willie Sparrow and Art Webster weren't in the fight, of course—being batmen; and as for Jim Stott, he's by way of being a battalion hero just now. He's got his corporal's stripes. They say—but I don't know what truth's in it: probably not much—that his rifle was knocked out of his hands early in the attack, so he seized a Turkish officer round the belly and enjoyed a wrestling match with him, talking to him in broad Lancashire and saying, 'Eh, lad, boot Ah'm not taking any back-chat from thee, tha knows.'"

"And Ernie Botten?" inquired Tony.

"Oh, Ernie, he lumbered across No-Man's Land as casually as if he were driving a Twineham cow to market, and finding no one in the opposite trench, sat there and picked his teeth until someone should explain things to him."

"And what about Fred Roberts and young Dicky?"

"Oh, Fred stopped something," Quickshaw remembered. "Yes, Fred stopped a chunk of shell in the bombardment."

"Not killed?" asked Tony anxiously.

"Lor' bless you, no. They took the chunk out of him at No. 17 Stationary and he's got it by the side of his bed at this moment. I saw him in hospital—he's just the same as ever;

he insisted that his wound was nothing and didn't hurt at all, and proceeded to grumble like hell because some orderly had lost the boots he'd had all through the war and was trying to foist a new pair on to him."

"And, padre, have they—has there been any talk in the Brigade about my going away?"

This question averted Quickshaw's face in a manner that made Tony's heart beat quick with fear.

"*Has* there been any, then, padre? Oh, tell me; please tell me."

Quickshaw told him the truth with his usual out-spokenness. Yes, there had been a deal of comment, and mostly unfavourable; it was all too stupid for words, of course, but there you were: decent fellows like Scrase and Anson might maintain that nothing but bad luck had timed O'Grogan's departure for the worst possible moment, but if people didn't want to believe a thing, they wouldn't believe it; they just asked, "Why the devil did O'Grogan apply in the first place for a transfer if it wasn't that he didn't like the look of things on Gallipoli——"

"Oh, it's a lie!" interrupted Tony, almost with tears in his voice. "They know I didn't go for that reason, whatever I may have said!"

"Of course you didn't," agreed Quickshaw, adding with a grin, "You did it to relieve Kut or something, didn't you?"

"Yes, and when there seemed to be nothing happening on the Peninsula. And they all said themselves it was a sound thing to do."

"They say a lot of things they don't mean."

"Yes. . . ." Tony walked up and down with his thoughts, and suddenly continued: "And I was a blasted fool to hide my real reason under a lot of talk about being fed up with Gallipoli. They expect you to talk that kind of stuff, but only so long as you're not acting on it."

"That's it!" nodded Quickshaw with some enthusiasm. "That's them exactly! They talk cynicism, but they don't expect you to *be* cynical."

"No . . . but . . . but why can't they see that it wasn't any fault of mine that my orders came through at such a vile moment?"

"Bah!" scoffed Quickshaw. "Most of them don't know

any details. They simply hear it whispered that you went while the going was good, and they believe it and pass it on, like the sheep they are. It makes a good story. These army libels generally get started without any real root at all."

Tony nodded bitterly. "Yes; and once they're started, it's the devil's own job to root 'em out. Denying them seems only to strengthen their roots." He sat down on a box and rested his elbows on his knees. "It'll probably follow me all my days in the army, and there's nothing at the bottom of it at all." Restless, he rose up again. "Tell me: have the men heard this yarn?"

"Yes, of course they have." Quickshaw said it almost cheerfully.

"Oh, Christ!" Tony moaned.

"But, for your comfort, there are one or two who won't listen to it. Jim Stott fr'instance. He said to me, 'Ah reckon Ah know when an officer's got t'breeze oop and when he hasn't, and if anyone tells me that Mr. O'Grogan ever had cold feet, I say he's a liar and that's that.' You've a champion in Jim Stott. He's got an ounce more brains than most."

"Good old Jim!" murmured Tony; but it wounded him to think that the men were even debating such a topic; and he walked miserably to and fro before asking, "And tell me another thing: is Moulden anywhere in this picture?"

"Oh, *that* man!" said Quickshaw, with a finality of contempt which was in magnificent discord with his Christian calling. "He's a worm."

"Yes; but has he been saying anything?"

"Of course he has. What do you expect?"

"By gosh!" swore Tony, "if I meet him again——"

"Yes, and he does it in a particularly slimy way," continued Quickshaw cheerfully. "He first tells people what's being said, and then says that, in his opinion, it's not *wholly* fair. There's a world of poison in that 'wholly.'"

"Oh, my God! Don't tell me any more!" begged Tony. "I never felt quite so like killing anyone in all my life."

"I shouldn't worry," Quickshaw comforted him. "You're going to India, and we'll probably go to France—if we ever get off Gallipoli alive—so there'll be half a world between us."

"What I should like to do," said Tony, his fist closing at his side, "would be to get back to the battalion, and then

I'd show them if I'm a funk or not; and when I'd got the bloody V.C., I'd shove it down Moulden's throat."

"He's not worth worrying about."

"I know he's not," Tony admitted, sitting down again. "But there it is! The things that aren't worth worrying about are always the things that worry you to death. . . . Padre, you'll do your best to scotch his dirty lie for me, won't you? You'll tell them that I've been moving heaven and earth, trying to get back to them——"

"Of course I will," said Quickshaw; "but it won't do any good." His comfort was always of an exceedingly limited nature.

"Why?"

Tony could feel and see why, but in his pain he had to ask the question.

"Because people don't believe anything if they don't want to."

But Quickshaw did not get back to the Peninsula—at least not for many days; there was too much urgent trafficking along the line of communication between Mudros and Helles; and all the time, so thought the impatient Tony, the roots of this ugly little tale about himself must be thickening, and its branches creeping. Quickshaw, by way of consolation, suggested that everyone would now be saying that *he* was scrimshanking too; and that for his part he didn't care whether they said it or not; *he* wasn't going to break his heart about the talk of a lot of tenth-rate minds. Which was all of little comfort to Tony, since the indurations of another man's heart didn't alter the tender places of his own.

Indurations? One may wonder, for Quickshaw shared Tony's tent in these days, and thus a hidden side of him was revealed to a friend. Tony saw him at night kneeling for a very long while by the side of his camp bed, with his face buried in his hands, or in the crook of his arm as it lay along the blanket. He saw also that, under the faded khaki shirt, he wore on a soiled cord a tiny crucifix against his breast.

For three days Quickshaw fumed around his castle of stores where it stood awaiting transport; and then abandoned it with an oath, muttering, "Well, let them rot there. *I'm* not

going to spend all day sitting on my behind on a lot of muck for the Brigadier's belly." And he turned his attention to various jobs on Mudros East, which, so he said, might very well have been done sooner if anyone had the brains to think of them. There was first the job of bringing the Red Cross comforts which were idling by the shore into useful contact with the sick and wounded who were lying unutterably bored in the hospital tents. Apparently there were no other chaplains in the immediate neighbourhood to do this job, dysentery, jaundice and other Lemnos plagues having swept the district clean of them; so Quickshaw, who was never once sick throughout the whole Gallipoli campaign, or, if he was, never showed it, proceeded to do their work for them, after ventilating his wonder that such weaklings had ever quitted the hot-water bottles and bed-socks of their English vicarages. (Wherein, of course, he was grossly unfair to some quite good fellows; but then Quickshaw was often unfair.)

Among the Red Cross comforts there were gramophones and gramophone records, and Quickshaw soon had all of these turned out of their billets, "fallen in," and detailed to the various wards, where he would inspect them and see that their noses were kept to the grinding stone—while he distributed among their listeners his packets of Wild Woodbines and tins of sticky sweets (also provided by the Red Cross Society, which had so much to answer for when the day of reckoning came). These painful comforts disinterred by Quickshaw were one and all those ventriloquial instruments which, instead of trumpeting their noise through great tin throats, opened doors in their wooden stomachs and let out the cacophony that way. And in 1915, the Gallipoli year, if there was one form of gramophone more inexcusable than others, it was the one that talked through its stomach. Because you couldn't properly hear what it had to say. And if you had to hear the damn thing at all, you'd as lief have heard it well.

Easily the most popular tune rendered by this shocking team of gramophones was the "Song of the Rag-picker." So far as this gentleman's words were audible, he appeared to be stating that he was "a rag-picker, a rag-picker, a rag-time-picking man" and that "most anytime of the day, you could hear him picking away, for he was a rag-picker, a rag-picker, a rag-time-picking man."

It was true enough. Somewhere among the dysenteries and enterics, the jaundiced or the para-typhoids, in the bivouacs of the Indians, or even in a bell-tent of sick Turkish prisoners, you could hear him picking away.

Now with the exception of the C.O. of one of the hospitals (who, whensoever the Rag-picker obliged in the distance, produced a piccolo from his pocket and accompanied him in his efforts), the Medical Officers, the Quartermasters and the finer-calibred N.C.O.s wished the Rag-picker to Jericho. It was all very well, they argued, for Padre Quickshaw to set the Rag-picker going for the sick and convalescent, who were only dwelling for a few days in the hospitals and, at the worst, wouldn't hear him more than four-score times; but it was a hard case for those whose permanent work lay in the camps. And the matter was made worse when the convalescents took to roaring the Rag-picker's little refrain in chorus, even when the gramophones were silent. And the very victims who grumbled most heartily at the vogue of the jingle would be detected whistling its catchy bars. Shamefacedly they would maintain that the abominable ditty was so running in their heads that willy-nilly they must whistle it. "One day," they said threateningly, to prove that their attitude was still sound, "there'll be an accident to that record. The Rag-picker'll find his voice cracked."

His voice did crack: it cracked right from the centre to the circumference. But most people believed that the breaking was innocently done. All the more did they think so, when they saw some who had been loudest in their exultation over the fracture seeking to repair it and enable the Rag-picker to sing once more. And they succeeded. After a little treatment he took to the boards again, and sang with a *hic* in his speech at regular intervals:

> "Most any *hic* of the day
> You can *hic* him picking away,
> For he's a *hic* picker, a rag-picker, a *hic* time picking man."

We have heard him since in other lands than Lemnos, but like a strolling player who carries his scenery with him, he brings a dim reproduction of hills and mills and harbour, and spreads it about him where he sings.

One late afternoon, when Christmas was drawing very near,

Quickshaw was standing beside Tony, looking towards the Egyptian Pier.

"Good gracious, O'Grogan," he said indignantly. "What's this little lot coming up?"

As a rule the only arrivals from this jetty, nowadays, were the mournful processions of dilapidated wounded and sick who, bandaged and ticketed, poured into the hospitals in two or three shifts a day. But here, this afternoon, men were approaching, spick and span in their naval uniforms, and carrying black leather bags of uncouth shapes and music-stands. Occasionally from their midst there flashed, in the falling sun, the polished metal of their instruments.

"It's a band from one of the warships," Quickshaw suggested.

The leader of the band, approaching the padre, and mistaking him in his careless attire for some R.A.M.C. orderly, inquired:

"Hey, chum, where do you keep this bloody sky-pilot? We've got to report to him?"

"It's me," said Quickshaw.

The man apologized, and asked to be shown a good site where "his lads" could give a brief performance. He seemed rather ashamed of being ashore at all.

Quickshaw escorted them to the space on the low summit between the wheel-winged mills, where, having an Australian hospital on one side of them and an Imperial hospital on the other, they could entertain both at the same time. And here a large crowd of convalescents, attracted by the smart uniforms and the shining instruments, quickly formed an outer circle; the musicians with their music-stands formed an inner circle; and the conductor stepped into the middle and formed the bull's-eye. He tapped his stand with his baton, looked around and inquired with his eyes but not with his tongue if all was ready, then poised the baton in the air and framed with his lips the words, "One—Two—Three." The band struck up with nothing more appropriate than "Put me amongst the girls."

Tony watched the crowd; a crowd, remember, made up of exiles marooned one Christmastide many years ago on a bleak island; and of some of the sickest and weariest of them all. He felt its pulse, as it were, to test the effect of the music. There were witticisms, of course; but only a few; as a whole it was a ring of silent men who gazed like wondering children at the

polished brass of the instruments and the immense activity of the big drummer; and their eyes were wistful like the eyes of ruminant animals. When a flimsy waltz succeeded the last tune, the humorists clasped each other's waists and danced round the mill, but the men of the great wistful majority remained where they stood, with their hands in their pockets. And on the completion of the waltz they only accorded their applause as a dreamy afterthought.

Then the leader of the band produced a large tin containing Wild Woodbines and boxes of matches. Lest anyone should suspect him of generosity, he said in a casual tone which suggested that he only wanted to get rid of the worrying stuff:

"Here, have some of these fags, you fellows."

In their sickness and war-weariness the tommies could be selfish enough at such times, and there was a rush and a scramble for the coveted cigarettes, during which music-stands were overturned and the musicians, who had clubbed together to buy the gifts, blew spittle out of their instruments to conceal their satisfied smiles.

And after the outer circle had been reformed, and the overturned music-stands picked up, and the musicians' mouths wiped, the band did an outrageous thing. It was unpardonable, and Tony gathered from the truncated grin on Quickshaw's face that he had put them up to doing it. They played a certain tune which was greeted with groans, laughter and applause, till at last all sounds merged into its monstrous chorus of:

"He's a rag-picker, a rag-picker,
A rag-time-picking man."

Another evening, just after the bugles had sung Retreat, Quickshaw and Tony heard the strain of the bagpipes, and turning their eyes towards the sound, saw a body of spruce pipers walking in the direction of the hospitals. They had come from some Scotch regiment encamped on the Mudros hills. As they entered the hospital lines the leader executed some remarkable steps which had the effect of bringing the tune, after a few bangs on the big drum, to a crisp finish. Then failing (as they all did) to recognize Quickshaw's rank, he came up to him to apologize for the arrival of his band and to offer an excuse.

"These loonies a'coom by request of the meenister," said he,

" to play a wee-bit tune—just to sort of cheer up the bloody sick."

" Thank you," said Quickshaw. " I was waiting for you."

It was useless to invite these people to occupy the space between the mills because, as everybody knows, pipers are entirely uncomfortable if they cannot walk about as they play. Perhaps there is some air-cooling process involved in their parlous instrument—one doesn't know. But away with their whirling drone went the kilted men, up the Enteric line, down the Dysentery line, and up past the Infectious Wards, playing themselves along with Highland flings and Scottish reels. There was a bully wee big-drummer who did half the exercises known to Indian-club swingers—all among his beats upon the drum. Now he twirled a stick upon each side of his head; now this one alone, now that one alone; a *bang bang* and he was swinging both in the vicinity of his left ear; a *boom bang boom* and he was swinging both in the vicinity of his right ear; then he wheeled them over his shoulder-blades and suddenly banged one skin of his drum with both sticks at once, and then the other skin with both sticks at once; and then each skin with either stick—and all for the love of the thing too, for his real audience was abed behind the canvas.

Just about the middle of " The Last Rose of Summer " the leader, not sure whether he had completed the tour, brought his pipers in full skirl, kilts swinging rhythmically and white knees flashing, back towards the place where Tony was standing by Quickshaw, wishing he had joined a Highland regiment and could wear kilts. As he was still blowing into his great bladder when he drew near them, his mouth was not available for questions, but his eyes, from above flushed and swelling cheeks, asked plainly:

" Is there anywhere else we ought to go? "

Quickshaw hinted that they might circumambulate the barbed wire that railed in Johnny Turk's compound, for why shouldn't the old Turk be taught to keep Christmas? So, quite delighted, for undoubtedly the last thing they wanted to do was to stop, they marched off, giving " Auld Lang Syne " to the Turks, till at last they played themselves over the hilltops.

There were bales of hymn-sheets in those Red Cross comforts; and well—us Mudros lads (as we sometimes called ourselves) were soon rolling up in fine numbers to Padre Quickshaw's evening services. These services were held just before sun-

down each evening on the space between the mills. Mind you, we were not saints, although there were some very pious fellows among us who were to be regularly found sitting on the mills' stone steps, actually *before* the service was advertised to start. But most of us were no better than we ought to have been and swore far more than was good for us ; still, we rolled up all right to Mr. Quickshaw's evening service. Some of us came because we were merely curious, and there was not much harm in that ; some because we were deadly dull and welcomed any relief from the monotony of the island, and again there was not much harm in that ; and some because we liked to hear our voices in hymns, and who shall say there was much harm in that ?

These were snowball services. They began with a dozen pillars of the church sitting down at the fall of the day beneath the mill and singing a hymn. The rest of us were shy creatures and waited till proceedings had further developed. Three more hymns, chosen by vote, followed, during which we strayed up. We didn't much care in what dress we came. We strolled out of the Convalescent Wards in pyjamas and overcoats ; we sauntered up in bandages and splints ; we were wheeled up in invalid chairs ; or we lamely limped, supported by a sound-legged comrade. When we were huge Australians we often wandered into the congregation with an air that said, " We are not committing ourselves to any conclusion by joining this crowd, but we don't mind taking a hymn-sheet and listening to what you've got to say."

So whatever we were, we strolled up, flopped down into any position on the ground, and, having thrown away our cigarettes, or knocked out our pipes (because, after all, we were at church), we joined in the hymns. That is to say, we did this unless we were Indians, when we sat on our heels at a little distance and watched the passage of events. Once, by the way, we were a brown Maori, who came right into the middle of the choir, being not a little proud of our Christianity.

At the fifth hymn, in response to a suggestion from the chaplain, we rose to our feet and discovered that we were a big international ring of sick men and hale, bloodless and bronzed, all holding torn and soiled hymn-sheets in our hands. The khaki parson, who knew nothing about music, was in the middle conducting. He did most eccentric things, stopping the hymns half-way through and saying, " We'll sing the next

verse softly, please, and in the following verse, let the sound swell out as much as possible;" all of which we were most willing to do, for we were sentimental persons and liked dramatic effects in our singing.

Generally the singing of our great male-voice choir was good to hear. There were amongst us many singers, trained and sweet-voiced, who improvised our harmonies. Orderlies on duty in the hospital lines came to their porches and stood there listening. There would be extraordinary quiet within the wards, where the men, lying in their beds, liked to listen undisturbed, when the familiar tunes came through the doorways, along with the gathering darkness. The Medical Officers (who never go to church) reclined in their hammock chairs at the outside of their tents, smoked, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the Lemnos evening, which was usually still and lovely, and of the distant chorus.

The padre never allowed us to forget the Navy, which had chaperoned us so jealously in the Gallipoli Ball, from its first dance to closing time; so we always ended our service with "Eternal Father, strong to save": we got to know it by heart, and for some of us its Mudros memories will haunt it for evermore. We sang it with our hands at our sides as, a minute later, we would sing "The King"; because by this time the darkness had deepened and the use of our hymn-sheets was impossible. For you must remember, if you would like this picture complete, that our service began just before sundown, and, quite early in its course, a golden sun began to drop behind a sweep of violet hills.

Sunset was the only lovely thing on Lemnos Island; and for how many does the name "Lemnos" remain the best-hated name in the war? The old Peninsula, compared with dull-hilled Lemnos, was a lovable place. Perhaps this was because in the Mudros camps we enjoyed all the plagues of the Peninsula, but none of its excitements; perhaps our morbid hatred was subconsciously rooted in the bitter contrast we drew between the high feeding and good drinking on the ships, and the wretched feeding and contaminated drinking ashore. The hatred, as always, was expressed less malignantly than humorously. In his darkest ennui 2nd Lieut. O'Grogan

would say, "Mudros may not have been the last place God made, but it was certainly one of the last," and Padre Quickshaw would answer him, "Yes, it's not one of His successes."

The ennui had a tongue like an ant-eater, reaching out to any and every rumour. Joe Wylie treated his "boss" to a new rumour each morning when he called him; and to another at sunset; and one day he brought a story that was striking indeed. Christmas was forgotten now; the urgent traffic between Mudros and Helles had quieted; Quickshaw was gone, having abondoned his stores and hurried back to the Peninsula for fear of what was afoot there; and the year 1915 was within a day of its end—God speed it into the past and into history, for it was full of a big tragedy, but full of interest and beauty too!—and Joe came shouting:

"They're coming awf, sir. They're coming awf at once!"

"Who?" asked Tony.

"The boys on Helles, sir. Some's awf already."

"Do you mean we're going to evacuate Helles?"

"Yussir. I seen the Lancashires. They come awf last night and they're over the water there, at Sarpi."

"But how on earth can we evacuate a second time? Johnny must be up to the game now?"

"Well, it's like this here, sir. They do it like this, sir." Confidentially—but most excitedly—he took his rifle and laid it on some boxes at the tent door. "They're up to all manner o' tricks. Nah, then; there's your rifle on the parapet pointing at Johnny Turk." He picked up an empty cigarette-tin (fifty Gold Flake). "You tie this 'ere empty tin to a lever connected with the trigger. Got that, sir? Well, then you take this one"—he picked up an empty condensed-milk tin—"you pierce a little hole in its bottom, and you fixes it right over the empty one—so. Then you fill it with water, and the water drips ever so slowly into the empty tin underneath—it may take a *hower*, sir—and when the bottom tin is filled up to a certain weight, dahn it goes and pulls the trigger, and, gaw! the bloody rifle fires—excuse me, sir—the rifle fires, and there ain't no one near it! Nah! the fellow what owned it is down on W beach by that time getting into a lighter."

Joe was so pleased with his mental picture of the fellow doubling down the Gully Ravine towards a lighter that he kept the back of his hand under his long nose and over his smile for quite a time.

"Damned ingenious," Tony acknowledged.

"Yussir." Joe smoothed down both wings of his moustache. "Or you could work it by filling the top tin with sand."

"You could, Wylie?"

"Yussir. And look here, sir, you can do the same trick with a candle and a bit o' string. When the candle burns down as far as the string, it breaks it and lets go some gadget, and your machine-gun starts firing. Gaw! 'tain't 'arf smart——"

"When did you hear this?"

"—and jest a minute, sir! Don't yer see that, with these contraptions fixed all along the fire trenches, you can keep the front line spittin' and cussin' when the boys that manned it have long ago done a guy and are half way to Lemnos?"

"Where did you get this tale from?"

"Law bless yer, sir; everyone knows it. Known it fer some time. Our Essex boys are comin' awf in abaht two days."

"Are they? Great Scott!"

"Yurse, sir; and the last lot's comin' awf on January the eighth. They'll set these 'ere gadgets going in the firing line and trapes dahn to the beaches—oh, ever so quietly—and the Navy'll be ready for 'em with its pinnaces and lighters and destroyers."

"Dear old Father and Mother come to fetch them!" laughed Tony.

"Yussir. Home from the party."

Was it all true? Possibly, because night after night, from now onward, the little boats were bringing troops from Helles and decanting them into the hutments and the tents on the Sarpi side; and one January day Tony looked across the water and knew that he was looking at the tents of the Royal West Essex Brigade. Over there were Colonel Tappiter and Scrase and Hughes Anson; and the officers of the sister battalions. Over there were Corporal Jim Stott and "Little Willie" Sparrow, Art Webster and Ernie Botten.

He was seized with a fear of them; of officers and of men. Oh no, he wouldn't go over on a visit; he couldn't face the cold looks of some and the false uncomfortable geniality of others. Go over and explain the sickening tale again? No! Disputing a lie—talking about it and about—only manured its roots. Oh, if only his "further orders" would come quickly and waft him thousands of miles away from the scene of his

blunder! It made him feel a sneak to be skulking on this side of the harbour when his old brigade was yonder at Sarpi. It would lend colour to the lie if the officers learnt that he was here, and wondered among themselves why he didn't come over to see them. . . . Perhaps he had better go to them. . . . No, let him wait and see if to-day would bring his orders. . . . But he would have liked to give Moulden the stinging of his tongue before he lost sight of him for ever. . . . No orders? Well, let him wait one more day. . . . And by gosh! if he were sent to Mesopotamia, he would perform there some tremendously heroic act which would echo round the world and make his traducers look foolish indeed.

So went Tony's little conflict against the background of one far greater. Whether or not the Turks were alive to the plotting on Cape Helles, all Mudros suspected the truth, and watched, and waited. By the night of January the seventh Mudros told Mudros that only the covering troops were still under Achi Baba, and the hazardous task of drawing them off would be attempted the next day. January the eighth; this had been the anxious date all along. And January the eighth: here it was, bright over Mudros. Oh, thank God it was a friendly day with a clear sky and a slight sea.

All that day Mudros waited; speaking only of the one topic; giving a cheer to any ship that went out of the harbour; listening to the throb of guns in the north-east. Not much louder to-day than usual, that throb. Was the Turk still unawake, or was he just indifferent? If the guns attained a drum-fire density, it would mean that terrible things were happening to the stout fellows who had covered the retreat. But all day long the throb was no more than that regular heart-beat which, during its eight months of life, had been the pulse of the Gallipoli fight. There was no acceleration as of a heart excited. The weather stayed fair; which was good, because if the wind were to rise and the seas mount high—what then? Aye, what then? Those who had seen the Gallipoli beaches in storm shook their heads in despair of an answer.

With the darkness the wind *did* rise: it curveted about the camps; it crinkled the harbour water, and flapped the bell-tents; and each time the poles strained and creaked the officers turned their anxious faces to one another and grimaced. Like the wind, rumours rushed abroad all night, visiting the mess tables and the tents, and circling round the camps: the men on

Helles were all scuppered, said one; they were all off, said another; a German submarine was sinking the ships as fast as they tried to get away, said a third; and, strongest tale of all, there was a great battle in progress, and reinforcements would be hurried from Lemnos; one had better stand by.

But the night, if windy, was quiet; there was no noise of a great battle. And more rumours came, and more rumours. But no troops yet; no destroyers or trawlers or old Isle of Man packets entering the harbour heavy with men. Tony, forgetful of his own trouble, and more excited about this than ever he had been in the old days about an international match, arranged an all-night sitting in his tent. He and a few others waited there for news, keeping silence more often than speaking. They smoked away the hours; and at midnight the first whiff of certain news drifted up to them. A destroyer, crowded as a corn bin, had come into the harbour amid cheers; and its story, such as it was, had floated ashore: the Turks, said the destroyer, had been quiet enough when it left; but it was early then—only eight o'clock—and it couldn't say what had happened since. During the next hours there came more boats with more men; and all reported the same quietness on Helles: the Turk was asleep, or he was deluded, or he was glad to see them go. Tony's guests succumbed and went off yawning, but not he; he knew he would not sleep till he had heard the final result, so, still in his clothes, he got under a blanket and lay there smoking. And at some moment in the small hours there was a sound of a huge explosion away in the north-east. He started up and listened; then threw off his blanket and went out of his tent door and stood in the windy night, listening. If he were right, this meant that the last boys were clear of the Peninsula, and the charges whose fuses they had lit were exploding under the abandoned ammunition and stores. Another explosion; and he could have let loose an hurrah, there on the empty hillside! He wanted to rush into tents and wake people up, to tell them what was happening. There came a noise of cheering over the water; it was a ship giving tongue in the bay.

In these distant detonations, then, the story of Gallipoli had closed. It was over. So strange: yesterday Gallipoli was a real thing in the world; this morning—for it was morning now—it was only a thought! A gauze had fallen and shut it off amongst past things. With every minute, as he stood

here, it was retreating further into the past, its details misting out. With every month and every year it would give up more and more of its outline; and memories which had known it once would doubt if they were seeing it aright. Very strange and wonderful, if you thought about it, that a single second of time could transfigure a reality, vast and rather terrible, into an insubstantial thought, and give it the beauty and sadness of a thing remembered.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHIP OF DEFEAT

THE ships for the evacuation of Lemnos were in the bay. Big liners and little liners, swinging round to the wind, and empty. One loaded up and bore out majestically; and a camp of tents dropped on the Sarpi side, leaving a hill-slope bare. Another followed; and over there at Sarpi the tents which had housed the Lancashires were seen no more: where they had been there was only a field ready for a Greek to plough. Two mornings later Tony saw that all the tents of the Royal West Essex had been struck; and he knew that his old brigade must be embarking to-day. To-day the far side of Lemnos, except for a few hutments, was looking as it must have looked in the peace of July, 1914.

What about his own position? Everyone seemed to have forgotten him, who was now no more than a rationed guest of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. He'd go aboard the *Aragon* and remind the powers of his existence. On the *Aragon* he realized that they were far too busy emptying Lemnos to give attention to him: no one could find his dossier of papers. A staff officer said, "I seem to remember something about you. We communicated with Alex., but they've probably forgotten to do anything in all this chemozzle. However, I'll make a note about you."

The next morning a telegram came to the rest camp ordering 2nd Lieutenant O'Grogan to rejoin the 15th Royal West Essex on board H.M.T. *Empress of Britain* before 16.00 that day.

Rejoin the 15th! Oh, no, not *that!* . . . Pah! but it was almost laughable! He could see what had happened. The whirlpool of the Gallipoli Evacuation had bobbed him about in pretty fashion. Hardly had he been drawn from his unit before it had filled the scene and drifted him out of its way; then its turmoil had ended by sinking his papers or tossing

them into a limbo; and lastly, the complete change which it had wrought in the pattern of the war had demanded his return to his unit, at least till the whole world-strategy of the British Empire should have been reconsidered. In its magnificent unconcern for the individual, its effect on one tiny speck had been to make him abandon his regiment just when danger loomed and to come humbly back to it when danger was overpast.

Late the previous night a driving rain had begun to beat down upon the rest camp and threaten destruction to the standing canvas. All night it had driven by, and its power was not waning now. Tony called Joe Wylie and bade him pack. In these vile conditions, with the tent thudding its resentment above them, they hustled everything into valise and kit-bag, and sent the luggage out into the merciless day. Wearing a British Warm, and a Burberry over it, and a mackintosh cape over the Burberry, Tony dragged heavily down to the Egyptian Pier, where, having been thoroughly flogged by the rain and shaken by the wind, he sat down to get soaked upon his soaking baggage. The rain increased in fury. The plains upon which some of the Divisional camps had been placed were now a wild waste of mud flats and coffee-coloured lagoons. Such was his last close-up of the Mudros land.

A trawler, aptly named *The Flying Mist*, took him and Joe Wylie aboard, where they packed themselves among a concentration of saturated soldiery. She put out into the mists of the rain-whipped harbour, and passed under the 40,000 tons of ship that composed the towering hull of the *Olympic;* and headed, as the rain stiffened into hail, for the mouth of the harbour and the *Empress of Britain*, which was lying in the roads at anchor.

Tony felt like a nervous schoolboy returning to his classmates after a suspension in disgrace. He felt ashamed as they came under the lee of the *Empress* and he saw some of the men of the battalion gazing down at the trawler. Aboard, he walked hurriedly past officers who had turned as they recognized him. He went straight to Colonel Tappiter's cabin and poured out his tale, while his overcoat and mackintoshes poured rain on the floor.

The Colonel was sympathetic till he suddenly remembered that sympathy with a soldier was contrary to his creed, and said, "Dammit, O'Grogan! Doesn't it show you what I've

always said—that the individual is of absolutely no bloody importance? What the devil! aren't you doing what I've always told you's fatal"—he paused while he wondered what the devil it was that he was always pronouncing fatal—" aren't you setting up your own potty little happiness against the —er—against the needs of the show? If the show wants to make fools of us, it's got to do it, I suppose. I mean, I'd be fed up about this abandonment of Gallipoli if I thought I was of any importance at all, but since I'm not, I'll do what they tell me. Yes. . . . Well, I'm glad to have you back. . . . Good-bye."

It was a reasonable attitude, no doubt, and Tony thought that perhaps he would try to adopt it—but not, by Jove, till he had enjoyed a brief controversy with Moulden. But oh, it wasn't going to be easy to adopt. That came home to him from the looks of every officer he met. They were friendly enough, and yet—while there was nothing overt in their behaviour, a man had been obtuse indeed who didn't perceive the thought leaping behind their formal welcomes. Where was Kit Scrase? Where Hughes Anson? Scrase he found at last in the Smoking-room; and he had no sooner seen him than he decided not to worry him with his own troubles.

For there was a remarkable, a disturbing change in Scrase. Quickshaw had told him nothing of this! Kit appeared ten years older then when Tony said good-bye to him in Leigh Ravine one month ago. His cheeks had paled and sunk; his eyes had retreated into shadowed sockets; parallel lines had graved themselves across his brows; a nervous agitation shook his hands ever and anon; and a stuttering aphasia would sometimes impede his speech. He looked mind-sick; thought-harried; as if, like a bailiff, some secret fear was setting as master in his heart. He met Tony with lightsome words enough, but they hid nothing. Oh my pity, what had happened to Kit during those last days on Gallipoli?

The Roseate Hughes was the same as ever—red, plump, Dartmoor-cropped, laughing. "Oh yes," he said, with his wonted ruthlessness, "the idea's all over the shop that you quitted the battalion in its hour of need. Absolutely everywhere. Sorry to say so, but it's the truth. I've done my best for you, Bungay, trying to stamp it out, but it's not been any good. It's so damn difficult: if you deny a scandal too much, you only set people talking about it. I may say *en*

passant that my denials were very powerfully phrased. If I've told one bloke that he's a liar and a lunatic, I must have told it to a hundred, I'm afraid. Of course it's not among the 15th officers that the tale has much currency, but in the other battalions of the brigade." Perceiving the distress in O'Grogan's face, he shook his head, lifted his shoulders and smiled. "I'm afraid there's nothing to do, old Tono, but to live it down."

Driving back the tears in his throat, Tony asked about Scrase. Hughes could explain nothing. Kit had done magnificently in the attack on December the 19th, killing heaps of Turks with his own revolver and with another snatched from a Turkish officer. He had been recommended for gallantry. But he had never been quite the same since—to anyone who had eyes to see. Cheerful enough sometimes, but it was all forced; and (this entirely between themselves) Hughes had once come upon him when he was handling his revolver in a most suspicious way. Shock, perhaps. And, anyhow, he'd bucked up quite a lot of late.

Moulden? Aha, yes! That was the lad. There you'd put your finger on it. Moulden thought his methods very subtle and clever, but they were transparent enough, really: the lad's intelligence was of quite a low order. "You know what his method is, Bungay: he puts up a smoke-cloud of words about his liking for poor O'Grogan, and quietly lays his mines behind it. Once he came along to me to enjoy a discussion about you, but he got his *quietus* at an early stage, I can promise you. Yes, you come and see him off. See him off properly. Put 'paid' to his account. I shall enjoy that. I'll stand in the alleyway outside and listen. The blighter's in his cabin three doors along." And Hughes' fingers closed on Tony's arm and guided him towards Moulden and Moulden's punishment.

Tony was a little disconcerted at being propelled to the interview so quickly. He would have liked a half-hour's preparation before being asked to release the virulent stream which he had imagined; the width of three cabins was hardly space enough in which to find phrases. But he did not want to disappoint Hughes, who of his good nature had been virulent himself in his behalf, so he pushed his way into the cabin, setting his teeth and fanning up his wrath to the desirable heat. And as Moulden's face swung round to him, he said

hurriedly (was not Hughes Anson waiting?): "I just came to tell you that you're a liar and a cad, Moulden."

From the alleyway without came an undeniable chuckle.

Moulden was palpably surprised by his visitor, and for a second abashed; his lined face—Tony had forgotten how lined it was—flew a white flag at first, then a red signal, striped and mottled; but he quickly covered the discomposure, and offered him a patient, forgiving smile.

"Hallo, O'Grogan. You back? Why, good gracious, what's the matter? You look——"

"I suppose you can't help it. It's a case of inferior breeding," said Tony brutally.

(Surely Hughes Anson had slapped his thigh.)

Moulden may have flushed, but it was clear that he had quickly resolved to remain cool and dignified, and so have the better of this sudden quarrel.

"Now look here, O'Grogan, you've lost your temper about something, or I shouldn't stand what you say—see? I mean, I never think it's sensible to take much offence—really—at what a fellow says in temper——"

"I don't care whether you stand it or not," spluttered Tony, whose style (so he found) was wretchedly spoiled by the consciousness of Hughes in the alley outside. "All I know is, you've been spreading lies about me, and it's time someone told you that you're a—a—an ill-bred cad."

"Please, O'Grogan! You should make sure of your facts before you launch these accusations. I've been—I mean to say: put it like this: there's no doubt that a nasty idea about you has got abroad, but I've been careful to correct it whenever——"

"All you've been careful to do has been to strengthen it as much as possible by arguing as to whether it was true or not—*I* know!—instead of calling them bloody liars as an honest friend would—as Hughes Anson did——" (Hughes Anson, unable to call "Hear, hear!" dropped a brace of appreciative coughs.) "I've heard! Heaps of people have told me. Squirmy creatures like you are pretty quickly seen through, you know. You're not as clever as you think. You may imagine——"

"Look here, O'Grogan," said Moulden quietly, "I take it you've said all you want to say; would you mind leaving my room? I mean, I really am not going to fight you with

your weapons. My breeding, such as it is, doesn't encourage me to do so—put it like that."

"It's not a question of fighting at all. It's a question of—of telling you off. You know you've got nothing to say, so you try——"

"Would you mind leaving my room," repeated Moulden with great dignity.

"Certainly I'll go. I've no desire to contaminate myself longer than I need;" and he went out, slamming the door.

It was all abominably feeble, a schoolboy's outburst. Tony hurried away: hurried past Hughes Anson, who was bobbing up and down in the alleyway and slapping his thighs with delight, and who called after him, "Not bad, not bad, old boy. A bit crude in places;" hurried out on to the rain-beaten deck. The incident had no humour for him; he was completely miserable. What had he done with Moulden beyond harden him into a grimmer enemy than before? Now that poor narrow intelligence would work more and more assiduously to keep the libel prospering. And the shame of it! The shame of dubbing him a coward when the truth was that he could not feel physical fear; rather did his blood delight at the prospect of danger and battle. "Oh, it's no good. No good. I shan't say another word about it to anyone. I must try to bear the thing with dignity, as though it didn't exist; or as though it were too ridiculous to disturb me. And gradually I must live it down. And by God I will! Only give me time. The war's young yet. Give me time, Mr. Moulden, give me time."

The *Empress* went out of the harbour at dusk and turned south for Egypt; and the shadowy Lemnos hills fell astern and faded into history, as the shadows of Gallipoli had faded before them. She hugged the Greek islands, fearing the submarines which would assuredly try to catch the armies that had escaped from Gallipoli. Machine-guns were mounted at points along her gunwale; a good six-inch gun looked out of her stern; and the men carried their life-belts every minute of the day.

Where to now? France? Salonika? Mesopotamia? Egypt?—here was an army from Gallipoli ready to be offered.

Who was going to have them? In a merry ship this was the merriest question. Anyone want any old rags and bones? Here we are, a secondhand lot—but any bids? Come now, who'll have us? We must be got rid of to someone, and we'll take on anything. "Any knives to grind? Any chairs to mend?"

As merry a laugh as any of them was Tony's. He kept up a fine façade of gaiety. No one should suppose that the whispering of little men could do so much as draw his eyes towards it. And Scrase, too: Scrase began to mend as the Aegean widened between him and Gallipoli. Youth and laughter returned to his face. He would sit on the deck with Tony and watch the Greek islands going by in a pageantry of purple and blue; and sometimes he would consent to argue as of old, but with hardly his former interest. To the worry entombed he gave no outlet. Not even to his friend O'Grogan.

Tony was the chief talker now. Enthusiastically he would talk of the Gallipoli story which was closed, and of the beauty it was gathering to itself as it withdrew into the past. The tale had such a lovely shape, he said on an evening when they left Mitylene behind, purple in the sunset; it began one dawn in spring with men coming up from the sea, and it ended one winter midnight with tired men slipping quietly away. . . .

Or he would talk of the campaigns ahead of them, and their chances; and of their lives after the war. There was an evening when he announced informatively, "We shall win this war, Kit."

"I'm glad," said Scrase. "But why, please?"

"'Why,' '*why*,' fool? Look there. And listen, my lad, listen!"

They were leaning on a rail, looking down upon the men spread all over the main deck for'ard. Some were playing "House"; some were singing to the accompaniment of Joe Wylie's mouth-organ; some called out an occasional quip; others slept. From the officers in the Smoking-room behind came the laughter and the singing of the cocktail drinkers. "Good-bye-ee," they sang, hammering on tables, "Good-bye-ee,

> "Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee.
> Though it's hard to part I know,
> I'll be tickled to death to go.
> Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee,
> There's a silver lining in the sky-ee.
> Bon soir, old thing! Cheerio! chin chin
> Nah-poo! Tootle-oo! Good-bye-ee."

And the men on the deck:

"Oh! Oh! hold me tight,
Squeeze with all your might . . .
My beautiful Baby Doll!"

"This is a defeated army, isn't it?" said Tony, looking down upon the men."

"Certainly," Scrase allowed.

"And it's not in any way different from what it was when it came sailing towards Gallipoli, cocksure of victory. It's the same good-natured crowd—quite confident that it'll win in the end. And so it will, Kit. It'll win just because it's the best-natured army in the world. This old war is fast degenerating into a test of endurance, and, in such a test, the best-natured army will be bound to win. . . . Do you see?" . . .

"Well, I hope you're right," said Scrase, rather wearily. "I hope it keeps fine for them."

"I *am* right. You wait and see! You just wait and see!"

When the curtain of that night lifted, it discovered a long line of white buildings, with here and there a group of palm trees or a tall tower; and at the eastern end the masts of much shipping. Alexandria. It had not the beauty of Malta, because lacking the terraces and curves of that grand harbour; but its white buildings reminded Tony of his approach to Valetta six months ago, before he had known war.

The *Empress* crawled into the harbour, her soldiers shouting to all the ships as they passed, "Are we down-hearted? No!" She moored herself alongside a quay, and thereafter all was fun. How the men roared with delight! Hosts of Egyptian beggars had been awaiting the arrival of the troopship, and two or three native policemen, in yellow drill and cylindrical yellow helmets, were endeavouring with old bits of stick to chase them away from her sides. They whacked them with their sticks, and kicked them, and slapped them with their hands—men, women and children alike. One gave chase to an impudent little Arab boy—who immediately received the unanimous support of the crowd on the *Empress;* chased him under the railway trucks, and round the field kitchens and water-carts assembled on the quay, and over a barrier of canteen stores, till at last, abandoning pursuit, he contented himself with hurling his stick at the urchin, amid roars of derisive laughter from the decks of the *Empress*. Pooh!

These beggars and packmen and street entertainers couldn't have been dispersed by forty such constables. They took their thwacks across their shoulders but stayed where they were, or they ran at the approach of a policeman, only to troop back again when they saw him engaged on a punitive expedition elsewhere. And the soldiers shouted encouragement. "Yuss, you come back if you want to, but swelp me Bob, why didn't you leave your nightgown off before you came?" Wasn't that the voice of Joe Wylie? Yes, yonder was a group of Tony's friends suspended over the rail. And Art Webster was quick to copy Joe: "Hi! what price your harem skirt? That's right, mate! *You* let the copper 'ave it! Put up your fists to him, lad." They distinguished an ebony Sudanese, and Corporal Jim Stott shouted to him: "Eh, lad, but what art tha looking so black aboot? Bah gum, he's blushing! Did you see that? He did blush—ee, he did, and all." Other soldiers were throwing pence to a conjurer who sat on his haunches and did wonderful things with coins and cards and eggs. Others cast a small fortune over a tiny little brown boy with fuzzy hair who, dressed up in a very dirty model of a private's uniform and armed with a slice of wood for a rifle, went through nearly every motion of the drill-book with a smartness that drew mighty applause and laughter from his military audience. "Move to the right in column of fours!" they yelled at him—"Form *fours!* . . . Here, jump to it, jump to it! . . . Rear rank, one pace step back, MARCH!" They tossed coppers into the pools which had formed on the quay that they might see the Arabs of either sex and every age scramble for the money, bowling each other over and sprawling on hands and knees in the filthy water. If a policeman bore down on the scrimmage and thrashed them where they bent, the *Empress* gave him its yells of laughter and abuse, but sometimes—be it admitted—its counsel and direction. Oh, a wonderful morning!

Tony went up to Hughes Anson where he watched. "This doesn't sound like a defeated army, does it?" said he. "This is just Malta over again." And to Scrase he cried in an overmastering enthusiasm, "I'm right, my boy, I'm right. These lads aren't beatable in the long run." And as he uttered the words, he sharply applied them to himself: he too had taken a fine old knock, but he would be like these men—confident that he could not be beaten in the end.

Now some of the senior officers were going down the gangway, and the "Gyppies," foreseeing a new source of income, swooped upon their baggage, five and six of them fighting for each valise. It was like nothing so much as the swarming of the Gallipoli flies over blobs of marmalade. A policeman raced up with a stick and dispersed them for ten seconds, as one scatters flies with a flourish of the hand. Some defied him and got whacked and kicked. More police happened along and chased them away, picking up lumps of coal from the quay and hurling them after the fugitives. Long practice had made them excellent shots, and often the coal caught the Gyppies on the smalls of their backs or on the sides of their heads. You can be sure that every such winning shot brought roars of congratulation from the *Empress*. Oh my God! ten hundred sides were aching with laughter. A wonderful morning!

And this—this surely—if one is telling of Gallipoli's men rather than of its strategies, was the real close to that old story. It would ever be so for Tony. Not that unhappy midnight when the *Snaefell* carried him away from the glow-worm lights of W Beach astern; not that anxious dawn in Lemnos when he heard explosions far away in the north-east and guessed that the rearguard had safely taken to the sea; but this morning, brilliantly lit by an Egyptian sun, when a shipload of the tired and beaten army came alongside the quay of Alexandria, bringing nothing but laughter.

PART II

CHAPTER I

A MURMURING IN THE WILDERNESS

THE desert lay as yellow as sawdust under the cloudless sky. Its wide floor was empty, except for that interminable thread of men coming out of the gauzy heat in the distance with a smoke of dust at its side. Surely a whole brigade marching: perhaps a division. West of this moving column, across ten miles of plain, rose the Guebel Attakah Mountains, a long wall of mauve fronting the yellow sand. East of the column ran two ribbons of water: one, the Sweet Water Canal with its fringe of greenery, and the other, the Suez Canal itself, in a stern geometrical line. Beyond the canals rolled the sand dunes of the Sinaitic Peninsula, till they met the angry wall of the Mountains of Sinai.

The thousands of men in that serpentine column could not see the Sinai dunes because the high embankments of the Suez Canal shut in their view; they saw only the weary miles of desert ahead and the gaseous haze along its marges rising to meet the sun. They were marching northward. Soon they had left even such comfort as the deadly Sweet Water Canal could offer them; it was still at their side, but no longer did its moisture seem able to conquer the desert and raise the groves of palm and cactus; now it was fringed only with rushes, under which the frogs chattered and tiny lizards ran about with nervous and jerky movements. A cormorant wheeled out from the palm trees behind, and poised and volplaned over the marching men.

The faces of all these men were white with dust like the faces of over-powdered ladies; their eyelashes were hung with dust, and their eyebrows and hair grey with it. Their helmets were pushed back, and the sweat trickled through the dust into their eyes and mouths; and they spat often, and cursed; and joked. On and on they marched, resting at every half

hour for five minutes, and at every clock hour for ten; during which blessed intervals their column disintegrated and became an interminable trail of recumbent soldiers. But praise God, there was an unforeseen halt, and a magnificently long one too, when they met the railway that runs beside the Suez Canal; for a long line of cavalry, coming from the west, had converged upon the same point and was crossing the permanent way; it was the Australian Light Horse trekking to the Canal. And hardly had these horsemen passed, tossing jibe for jibe to the poor infantry; hardly had the infantry scrambled to its thousand feet again, before, coming from the north, a railway train of cattle trucks, packed with soldiers, steamed slowly across the head of their column, and stopped. Oh noble barrier! we may all sit down again.

"Eh, lads, but we're theer!" Good Lancashire voices came from the train of cattle trucks.

"Theer? This ain't a 'theer'; it's nowhere. It's a bloody desert."

"We're getting down here, any road."

"Aye, we're theer, all reet—at side o' Canal."

"Room soart o' place. Ah reckon nowt to it, mesen."

"Goom! Ah'm going sick. There's not a poob anywhere."

At the sound of these Lancashire voices, the marching column became as a crowd of welcoming friends who have been standing on a London platform awaiting the Manchester train. The 162nd (Essex) Division on the sands shouted greetings to the 126th (Lancashire) Division in the train. Two divisions had met and recognized each other in the desert.

"Strike me pink! It's the procreating Lancashires! From Gallipoli. 'Ere, Jim Stott, you can talk their infernal lingo. Arst 'em what they want 'ere."

Jim Stott: "Hallo, chooms! Eh, but what are you doing in these parts?"

The train: "Well, bah gum! If it ain't the Royal West Essex fra t'owd Peninsula—foot sloggin'! They coom fra Gallipoli too, tha knows. Yon's Big Jim Stott, fra Owdham. Whey, but what's oop, lads; we thought you were all scuppered on t'Peninsula? Are you cooming to defend this rotten cut (canal) as well, are you?"

Jim Stott: "Aye. Are you?"

"Nay! Coom to watch tha doing it. We're fed oop and

made a Separate Peace. This is our Special trairn for Coop Tie. Hope it keeps fine for you. Where's Johnny Turk, any road?"

"Not above fifty miles owt theer, they say: in t'Sinai Desert, at t'oother side o' Canal."

"Is he really coomin', then?"

"Sure as muk!"

"Well, Ah reckon he's aboot reet. We invaded his ruddy territory at Gallipoli, so why shouldn't he have a shot at ours? Goom, ain't it starvin' cold?"

"The whole Turkish army fra Gallipoli's coomin', they say."

"Well, I'm reet glad. We got on champion there. He's a gradely lad, is Johnny."

"Aye. We had a shot at his Narrers, so now he's having a shot at our cut!"

"Well, good luck to him! He can have it, for all I care."

"Saam here."

The Lancashires detrained and fell in, and their cattle trucks rolled away. The Royal West Essex marched on, crossing a little bridge which spanned the Sweet Water Canal. On its farther side they passed a group of transport men who, leading their horses and mules to water, had to halt here till the whole 15th Battalion in column-of-route had crossed. These transport men, with their shirts open and helmets pushed back, lolled about and studied the procession lazily but with much interest; for, to the end of the war, the British soldier remained a civilian under his khaki, and could spend a thrilling hour watching the march-past of armed men.

In companies the Royal West Essex boarded the chain-ferry and were conveyed across the Suez Canal. They were over; and, being over, stood in the sacred lands of Sinai. The old defences of the Canal—barbed wire entanglements, beacons, and sandbagged trenches—were beside them; but they were to leave them behind and to go many miles farther into the wilderness, towards the expected enemy; for, as Kitchener had said, he chose rather that they should defend the Suez Canal than that the Suez Canal should defend them. As they waited, they watched the gangs of "Gyppy" coolies, who were laying roads and light railways and water-pipes along the Sinai bank of the Canal. A number of them were moving a giant timber from a barge, and they secured simultaneity of movement by reiterating in unison one dreary bar of song

which sounded like, "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" A native foreman, armed with a whip, plied it here and there on their backs with an astonishing detachment and impartiality. Quite indifferent to whether the labourers he struck were working hard or not, he laid his stripes upon the just and the unjust, like Allah his God.

The long serpent of men reformed itself—ten hundred free human agents content to be the atoms cohering in this single organism. It reformed, and, at a word, pursued its writhing course through the sand dunes. The 15th had diverged from the other battalions of the brigade and was marching to a destination of its own. Far softer this Sinai sand than the crisp desert floor on the other side of the Canal! As their boots sank in it above their uppers, the men cursed and joked and toiled on, while the sand flew away to leeward. They met the patrols of Indian Lancers who, mounted on Arab horses and holding their lances rigidly upright, were returning to the canal from their task of watching the wilds. They met the Bikanir Camel Corps—more turbanned warriors, high aloft on slender trotting camels. Then they passed no one, but seemed alone in the barrens of the Sinai Wilderness where the Children of Israel had wandered.

Sinai! What a name to conjure with! And this was it! Not an infinite flatness as one had imagined, but a stormy sea of sand, whose mountainous waves the wind had swept till their crests reared up in knife-edges against the sky or curved over like cornices in the Alpine snow. And what colours! Not a monotone of sandy grey, but long washes of mauve on the faces of the dunes, and streamers of rose where the sun-rays played upon their crests, and deep purple shadows in their fissures and their folds. And as one moved over their summits in the falling sun, one saw that the whole rim of the upturned sky had taken over the hues of sunset and the world was encircled in a riband of crimson.

In such a light as this the 15th Royal West Essex, with Colonel Tappiter at their head, compass in hand; and Hughes Anson, mounted on a fine Australian horse, leading A Company; and Kit Scrase, on a sprightly Arab, leading C Company; and Tony O'Grogan walking beside his platoon; and Quarter-master Weymann (who had succeeded Grimsby) bringing up the rear with his transport, came at last to their map-reference, where they must make their strong-posts and await the Turk.

It was a level plain under the sand dunes with a wide field of vision before it.

"Battalion, halt!" roared Colonel Tappiter.

"Well, here we are," said Scrase.

"Yes," Tony answered. "And now for the return match with Johnny."

Did a shade of fear cross Scrase's face, and his eyes turn away? Perhaps not: one could imagine these things; and for weeks now he had been his old witty self again.

"We seem to have marched out of the Iliad into the Bible," he said, looking around.

"Yes," Tony agreed in his enthusiastic way. "Yes, by jingo, and it's equally thrilling! I was thinking it out last night. Look here, old man: since this Sinai Peninsula is the natural road out of Asia into Egypt, it stands to reason that it wasn't only the Hebrew patriarchs who came this way, but the Syrians and the Assyrians and the Chaldeans and the Greeks and the Romans, and lastly Napoleon—that's so, isn't it?"

"Absolutely," Scrase allowed.

"Very well, then. It was time the British Empire fought here so as to be in the tradition. And, as you observed so correctly just now, here we are."

"We are," admitted Scrase facetiously.

"Jove! Then I think I'd rather be on this front than on any other!"

It was the morning after their arrival, and already a rectangular camp of bell-tents had spread itself on a sheltered lap of the dunes. A little way out in the desert two companies were digging in the soft sand a trench system or strong point, which was to be known as Leigh Post. Many miles away to the east cavalry were patrolling the solitudes in search of the enemy.

The sun blazed down and the sands burned, though February was not yet dead. In the opinion of all, the Turk would come before May because the hot season from May to October would make a campaign in the desert intolerable even for him. He was sure to come. His German lords would see to it that he attacked the Canal, if only to contain and immobilize in Egypt the British army which had escaped from Gallipoli. The Germans didn't want this army, reinforced and reconditioned,

to be thrown into the uneasy scales of France. And so it came to pass that Lieut. O'Grogan stood talking to Captain Scrase in a wilderness where once Jacob had talked with Joseph, his son, and, ten centuries later, Mary the Virgin had talked with Joseph, her mate, or played with Jesus her Child.

Tony, as sunrise after sunrise lit up the desert and awoke the battalion to another day, was eager for the Turk to come. Haunted always by the knowledge that a lie about him was abroad in the brigade, he waited with a trembling eagerness for the hour when he should stagger them all with his heroism. So completely now was this obsession his master that he had forgotten all his old doubts about the righteousness of killing his enemies—hell! he would slay thousands of them if so he could re-establish his name—and he had relegated to a second place in his mind all his loving thoughts of Honor—why yes, oh yes, he was ready to die doing some heroic deed and to leave her, if thereby he silenced the lie for ever. Such a little thing, the lie; and it could shake him thus! In the battalion he could see that it was only half believed: clearly he was not unpopular in the big E.P. tent, where all the officers now messed together; nor did Moulden, within their own battalion, do anything to undersap this popularity. But with the other three battalions of the brigade, alas! whenever he visited their messes, he could feel the unseen thought chilling their formal welcome. All right, all right! let them but wait.

And the men? Who could know if they were talking still? Oh, it was horrid—horrid to think! Well, let them but wait.

He feared that Kit Scrase, no matter how lively his manner might be, had none of this stomach for the fight. Kit and he shared a bell-tent now, and sometimes Kit would mutter in his sleep. One night his voice awoke Tony, and it was muttering, "Oh God! . . . Oh God! . . ." Just like that. The buried pain was finding a voice in the night which would not come abroad in the day. And never in the day did Tony ask him about it, reverencing his reserve; but he believed that sooner or later Kit would speak.

Colonel Tappiter, though deeply wounded by the abandonment of the Gallipoli adventure, had clearly accepted his own creed that a soldier's personal fancies were "of no bloody importance at all," and was addressing himself with a tremendous energy and vocabulary to reshaping, repainting and repolishing his

battalion for the coming fight. Probably in his subconscious mind there resided a fear lest, knowing the Sinai enterprise could never be to him what the Dardanelles enterprise had been, he should fail it, though never so slightly; and it was this fear which caused his present eruption into a bullying, hectoring Prussian. "I'll tighten 'em up," he seemed to be thinking to himself. "Gallipoli has relaxed and jaded 'em. A strong dose of Prussian discipline is what they want. *I'll* smarten 'em up and make 'em a power." So, on his new horse, a fiery bay of seventeen hands, he cantered wrathfully among the young officers who were drilling their platoons during the early morning parades, and assured them that their words of command were poisonous. "Poisonous, sir, poisonous! How can you expect these men to move smartly to a poisonous word of command like that?" Hughes Anson swore that one morning the Colonel galloped down upon A Company and yelled, "Who the devil's in command of this undisciplined crowd?" "I am, sir!" snapped Hughes, a thought sharply. "Don't answer me back, sir!" roared the Colonel; "don't answer me back!" and galloped away. And Weymann, the new Quartermaster, told a tale of his own, for the Colonel's latest manner was the talk of the battalion. "The other morning the C.O. was riding home to camp past my dump, with blue murder all over his face, and, as bad luck would have it, the transport men were unloading the ration and water camels, and letting go with a few obscenities; and the Colonel heard 'em—heard 'em just at their richest, my lad! —and he jabbed his spurs into his horse and charged up and said, 'Why don't you wash out your dirty mouths? Don't think that foul language is soldierly, because it isn't! Just you learn to keep your tongues under better control!' And at that moment—oh my sainted aunt!—out came Sergeant Fortis, not seeing the Colonel, and yelled out, 'God almighty! Aren't those bloody camels unloaded yet?' The C.O.'s face —it just turned scarlet, and he galloped up to poor old Sergeant Fortis and spluttered, '*Good God alive*, man! Here am I rebuking some privates for using foul language, and a bloody sergeant comes out and sets them the example!'"

At first this Prussian behaviour of the Colonel had filled the officers with dismay and resentment, so that they nicknamed him, "The Hun" and "Von Tirpitz"; but later, by a curious transition, the resentment softened into affection. It was the

affection which springs from mingled admiration and amusement. They had perceived the man's sterling loyalty to his job. And they had begun to suspect that there was as much humour as anger behind the Colonel's performances. Once he sent two of the companies out into the desert that they might practise marching by compass, and both of them, owing to the mismanagement of their young officers, were soon as lost as the flocks of Bo Peep. On their return, somewhat chastened, the Colonel assembled all the officers in the mess tent, including Weymann the Quartermaster; and to the surprise of all he turned his guns against the Quartermaster. "It's your fault entirely, Weymann, your fault entirely!" "Me, sir?" exclaimed Weymann, and one could hear him thinking, "What the hell——" "Yes, *you*, sir," retorted the Colonel. "Didn't I tell you to indent for a wet nurse for each of these officers, and have you done it?" Or look at his very different deportment on Sunday mornings when Padre Quickshaw came riding out to camp and held a Communion Service in the Sergeants' Mess for all men who cared to come. Always old Tappiter appeared, "slick on time, and polished up to the nines," and put up his spectacles to read his prayer-book, and knelt in the back row of all, behind the meanest of his men.

After Gallipoli's labours and pains the men were happy in this tented camp-life under a perpetual sun. Only the new drafts from England complained of the stewing heat in the tents and the freezing cold at nights; of the hard parades in the early morning, and the endless monotony of rest under canvas while the sun possessed the desert, and then the hard parades and fatigues of the cooling night. The gaiety of the camp expressed itself in many ways. There were the mascots.

In 1916 the newspapers at home distilled a few columns of dismay out of these Army mascots, inveighing against them as a relapse into superstition and heathenism. Oh patience, patience! What were they but concrete jokes? The whole army referred to itself as "the boys"; and under this school-like discipline they had become boys again, with a hundred pets and playthings. The sergeants of the 15th, great ruddy-cheeked fools, had a little white terrier about as big as a jam-roll for

four. They called him "Whizz-bang" and made him an identity disc, with his number, rank, unit and religion, as follows: "K9. L'ce Private Whizz-bang. 1/15 R.W. Essex. C. of E." Whizz-bang was a popular visitor in the Officers' Lines, where his favourite diversion was to hunt for and worry the officers' sponges. It was no uncommon thing for him to walk into the Officers' Mess during a meal with a large sponge between his teeth, and to worry it in the middle of the floor. His advent would be announced by an oath from the officer who recognized his sponge; and the mess waiter's feet would then propel him outside—he going unwillingly, with his hinder-parts slithering along the floor. The cooks' mascot was another little mongrel, so round and soft that all men feared lest Whizz-bang should one day mistake it for a sponge. The cooks called him "Cold-foot" and threatened to put him in the stew if the rations gave out.

And Hughes Anson had a mascot—a veteran mascot from Gallipoli. It was a small tin beetle, the size of a half-crown, whose motive power was derived from some elastic in his intestines. On the Peninsula Hughes had shaped for him a little dug-out next his own; and when empty of something to do, would set him charging into the sides of the trench or raiding in No-Man's Land at the end of a length of string. He called him Captain Jackson. But here in Sinai his elastic became "time expired," so Hughes promoted him to Temporary Major on the ground that he had very little to do. And if you went into Hughes' tent he troubled you to salute him.

The men's mascot was Absolom. Absolom the mule. When the battalion moved in column-of-route, Absolom would trot the whole length of the column with his head turned towards the men, exactly as if he were inspecting their march; and Joe Wylie, as the mule passed, would call out to the men ahead, "Hey there, boys! Pick your feet! Get into step now! Absolom's looking at yer! . . . Nah it's too late; you're *for* it, he's gawn awf to report you to the C.O."

And of course Wylie himself was seldom without a mascot; and the mascot might be anything from a chameleon, gathered tenderly off a twig of Sinai brush, to a young donkey. Usually, however, it was a mongrel pup, probably some little furry Ishmael abandoned by a pariah Abraham as he crossed the desert sands. Joe must have dragged about (or been dragged about by) half a dozen different dogs during the three years

he served Lieut. O'Grogan as batman. In this brief period of settled—one had almost said "pastoral"—life on the desert, the companion and favourite at the end of his leash was the young donkey, Billy; though the animal was not wholly his own, since he shared parts of it with his disciple, Art Webster. Wylie and Art Webster would bring Billy to the football matches of the battalion and run him up and down the touch-line to keep him abreast of the game; or they would pinch him (but not unkindly) to make him applaud a fine piece of play with his own peculiar cheer. If the game was slow and void of interest, they slyly paid out his rope and encouraged him in his friendly habit of biting the shorts and the puttees of the nearest man. It was friendly, and nothing else; he did it without a trace of viciousness; it was just his manner, when bored for lack of entertainment, of exchanging the time of day with his neighbour, and a pleasantry. Lieut. O'Grogan was once bitten in the calf by Billy, and the way the creature showed a care to close his jaws just enough to pinch agreeably but not enough to hurt convinced him, and all who stood by cheering, that Billy was not such an ass as he looked. It was on a famous occasion that Billy bit Lieut. O'Grogan. A new draft of officers had arrived the previous day, and Padre Quick-shaw was soon at Tony's tent demanding their whereabouts that he might visit them as their parish priest. Tony was trafficking in sugar with Billy at the time, and he stipulated that he would walk with the padre among the tents of Israel and introduce him to the new subalterns, if Billy might come too. Quickshaw said he had no objection to Tony's making a fool of himself if he wanted to; and Tony, having no objection either, immediately seized Billy's head-rope and endeavoured to drag him along the Officers' Lines. But Billy was not keen: he had to be persuaded to this bit of church work. Tony organized the persuasion in front and rear of him. He himself pulled in front, and another loyal layman who had been urgently summoned, Kit Scrase, pushed powerfully behind. Now Billy never objected to being pulled; he was rather partial to it, since it soon became a sportsmanlike tug-of-war in which he could feel that, if he was being defeated, he was not being disgraced; but to be pushed, to feel the pressure of a hot hand on either side of his tail, or a shoulder in the midst of it, was always more than his good nature could endure; so Scrase had not been pushing and shoving—and

shouldering—for any length of time before Billy got vexed with him and leapt forward and bit Tony.

Then Joe Wylie and Art Webster took him off to Three Days' C.B., first disgracing him by the removal from around his neck of the huge Iron Cross engraved "For Kultur."

Football had now resumed its rightful place in men's lives. Football on the Peninsula, under the frown of Achi Baba, had been discouraged in the latter days; which was perhaps a reason why most men accounted Gallipoli the worst front of the war. In the Wilderness of Sinai, where you could find little flats of hard, crisp, salty sand, amid the powdery softness of the dunes, football grounds of a very fair quality were marked out in no time. So it fell that, before the Turks came down upon the Canal, there was played the great and famous match, "Officers *v.* Sergeants." We must hear about this.

CHAPTER II

OFFICERS *v.* SERGEANTS

THE men chose to regard this match as entertainment of the first order. Joe Wylie painted an announcement of it and hung it outside his tent: "Stars *v.* Stripes or Brains *v.* Brawn." Another advertisement stated that two ambulances would be in attendance. But it promised to be a far more serious contest than this foolery suggested. There were among the sergeants three or four who could play the Soccer game with the best of its amateurs, and one, as the whole Division knew—one, Sergeant Lewis, who, though a Jew of Whitechapel, London, had played as a professional for Huddersfield Athletic. And the officers had been enriched by the recent draft with two young men, one from Malvern and one from Westminster, both of whom had been in their First XI's, and one of whom had subsequently played for the Corinthians; so they came, bringing no slender sheaves of reputation with them. As both these youths were attached to C Company and were likely, therefore, to be near companions of Tony till wounds or death, a sketch portrait of them must be given here. They were Harold Wimborne and Bernard Aylwin.

Harold Wimborne, the Malvern and Corinthian boy, was a big handsome lad, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and fair-skinned, and, in fine, as perfectly Saxon in appearance as anyone from our Islands has a right to look nowadays. Though he had passed his twenty-second birthday and was older by two years than Aylwin and many of the latest-joined privates, and though his height could not have been much under six feet nor his chest under forty inches, he was assuredly the youngest thing in the battalion. Uproarious and mischievous one hour, and blushing and timid the next; impudent to his seniors in the mess, and slightly afraid of them on parade; terrified (as he

confessed) of the sergeants, but sharp as a colonel with them if by a liberty they offended his youthful self-consciousness; blushing with shame every time he shouted his word of command, though it was an excellent word of command and would scatter a covey of birds half a mile away; giggling like a schoolboy when any misadventure occurred, or when the men looked somewhat ridiculous doing "Physical Jerks" at his invitation; bathing every morning (since "It's done, old man; it's simply done") in a ground-sheet pressed down into a hole, and singing and shouting in his bath; at mess loudly upholding every prejudice, every convention and every snobbery that one supposed to have been abandoned by intelligent persons fifty years before; bruised even to disbelief when Tony and Scrase declared themselves socialists; and as for when they suggested, baiting him further, that there was a good case for Conscientious Objectors and Sinn Feiners, why, then, beyond measure astonied; crudely uninformed about literature and music and art, but greatly informed about motor-cycles; easily prodded into a crimson-cheeked anger and huffiness, and ever-anxious to come the next morning with an apology no less crimson-cheeked; happy, conceited, willing, keen, dandified, diffident—there was hardly anything in him (unless it was his football) from which the stamp of the Fourth Form at Malvern had been erased. Hughes Anson early nicknamed him "Childe Harold," and Childe Harold he remained till they knew him no more.

Aylwin was marvellously different. A year younger than any of them, he was ten years older than all. He even looked older, his mouse-coloured hair being worn rather long and unkempt after the fashion of Intellectuals, his eyebrows meeting in a thoughtful frown, his green eyes fixing you without a trace of diffidence, and shining with intelligence, and his cheeks hollowed under the eyes, probably by the work of his rapid and unresting brain. Aylwin was undoubtedly clever, but not as clever as he supposed. He spoke with authority and immense information on every subject under the sun and on most above it; to Scrase, Tony and Moulden he expounded the whole truth about the Gallipoli campaign, even to describing the life in its trenches, and not for one moment did he pause to imagine that they who had been there might know as much about it as he who had never been within a hundred miles of Cape Helles; to Quickshaw he rehearsed the whole history of

the Sinai Peninsula, nor halted in his lecture to consider if the padre, for professional reasons, had not been compelled to sink a drag-net into Biblical and Early Christian story even more deeply and more widely than his own; to the gunner officers he catalogued the varying calibres of British, German, and French guns; to the officers of the Camel Corps he sketched the nature of the camel, and to the Transport Officer he explained gall and spavin, shock and overreaching and thrush, till the T.O. damned him to his face and, behind his back, lifted up his voice and cursed him loud and long. Hughes Anson called him "Aylwin the Authority," and there an end.

But Childe Harold and Aylwin had one thing in common, the excellence of their football. Harold Wimborne played it with all the genius of his magnificent young body; Aylwin with all the subtlety of his restless brain. To these two champions the officers' team could add nine others, all young, trim, light and athletic. Of those known to us Scrase was a Full Back who could be trusted to play with his head, Hughes Anson was as dashing, jovial and popular leader of the Forward Line as ever he was of a raiding party visiting the Turkish trenches, and Tony was admittedly the fastest man on either side. Moulden did not play the game; and what with his jealousy of those who did, and of O'Grogan in particular, and his growing hatred of the fixture and his simulated enthusiasm for it, he was probably living some very unquiet days. In youth and mobility the Officers would enjoy a great advantage over the Sergeants, who must array in defence of their citadel some very heavy ordnance indeed—"some 1895 models," as Childe Harold put it—such as, by your leave, the Regimental Sergeant-Major. And the officers would have large reserves of wind in hand when the supply of the Sergeants was running low, if complexions and waist-lines were any guide to the state of the wind. On the other hand, weight was with the Sergeants; and there were those among the men who declared that to set some of the junior officers against the sergeants was little better than cruelty to children. Anyhow, a great game promised, and a highly amusing one.

Interest ran high on the vigil of the match, and the betting likewise; and the odds were five piastres to three on the Officers. The Officers were favourites in every sense; and they were much gratified to discover that the men, when it came to a choice between their officers and their sergeants,

would yell for the Lesser Evil through thick and thin; it was their chance of a lifetime to get some of their own back on the Sergeants; with an especial reference, as will be seen, to the Regimental Sergeant-Major.

But wait! a secret. Did any knight in this most famous tournament approach its hour with his thoughts driven by quite such a childish whip as Lieut. O'Grogan, and he a thinker, and a philosopher among them? Oh, he knew all about the absurdity of the whip that chafed him, but it disciplined his sides none the less, and drove him in its narrow way. The men who watched the game had disputed among themselves whether or not he had shown cold feet on Gallipoli; he must shine in front of them; he must dazzle them with his fearlessness, his fury, and his address. There were Fred and Dicky Roberts to be impressed, and Ernie Botten, who would take home to Twineham a record of young Mr. O'Grogan of Sheep's Eye, and Jim Stott, who had fought his battles, and all the men, lately joined, who had probably been piqued very early with the story that dimmed his name. And Moulden. Moulden, on his touch-line, should suffer every pang of jealousy that cheers for his enemy could give him.

The teams, when they arrived upon the ground, the evening sun being low on the dunes, saw that every man of the battalion who was not confined by duty to the trenches, or by discipline to the Guard Room, was waiting on the touch-line in a high expectation; and some remarked a strange thing, that every fourth man held a whistle, or a mouth-organ, or an empty box, or a brass shell-case, or some other instrument which could contribute, when desired, to a din. Good-night, what now! What did this portend?

The whistle sounded, and there was a silence—so far all was natural: this was the silence of anticipation. But it endured, this silence—endured till it became uncanny, discomforting, ominous. What was toward? Tony, playing as Outside Right, glanced down his touch-line and over to the opposite one; and the stillness of six hundred men was so abnormal a thing that it shook his heart a little. There was no sound beneath the sky except the pounding of the ball upon the ground and the voices of the players, which seemed to echo in the evening light.

Ten seconds, and he understood. The ball reached the toe of the Regimental Sergeant-Major, and straightway every

whistle, mouth-organ, petrol can, clapper, cymbal and other instrument of music made the desert horrible with noise; the Sergeant-Major, at a moment due and just, passed the ball to a colleague, and all was peace again; it returned to his foot and the joyous uproar broke out afresh; after dribbling it a dozen yards (to this accompaniment) he transferred it, as was proper, to his Centre Forward, and immediately the uproar ceased with soldierly smartness. The Sergeants, apprehending this little *jeu d'esprit*, began to direct the ball towards their senior perhaps more often than was warranted by the chances of the game; and certainly Captain Hughes Anson, at Centre Forward for the Officers, once or twice overshot his mark and drove the ball nearer to the Sergeant-Major than to his own Wings; to the great content of the soldiers, who saw to it that all such courtesies were rewarded with a hideous volume of sound. The Sergeant-Major grinned—no more—and took every advantage of his favoured position. In these first few minutes of the game he had more opportunities of shooting goals than any other player on the field; but he was not a good shot, as a hysteria of cheers, whistles, cat-calls and percussion emphasized a score of times that evening.

After this humorous overture the game settled down to a right grim tussle, little quarter being asked or given. Neither Sergeants nor Officers were ever so set on beating the Turks as they were on beating each other to-night; maybe the Sergeants were stung by the incessant cheering of their opponents, and the Officers flattered. Tony, driven by his private whip, was playing, he believed, as never before in his life. With Childe Harold as his Inside Right, and Aylwin, a concentrated blob of will-power and subtlety, just behind him, as Right Half-back, his Wing was the very sickle-blade of the attack sweeping round to the Sergeants' goal. Again and again Tony's exceptional speed whisked the game from mid-field to the flank of the enemy's goal, and again and again Childe Harold or Hughes Anson shot the ball furiously at the posts—only to be met by the miracle-working hands of Sergeant Waller, who was fighting for his threatened gateway with a grit, a prowess, and a lightning swiftness that drew for him, not once, nor twice, but unnumbered times, the tumultuous applause of the crowd (notwithstanding they were backing the other side) and the seemlier hand-clapping of the Officers.

At last, by such a rush on his wing, Tony carried the game

from one end of the field to the other, and centred the ball with a lucky shot straight in front of Hughes Anson, who feinted towards the goal and then passed the leather—at all costs let us describe this matter in the true language—passed the leather, we say, with a scream "Shoot!" to Childe Harold, who shot it with such instancy and force that not even Sergeant Waller knew anything about it, and it streaked between the posts and raced away toward the open desert and the Turkish Empire. Now every box, can, whistle, clapper and gong, and every uvula acclaimed the first goal; while Tony jog-trotted happily back to mid-field, trying to look modest but feeling a triumph sparkling in his throat and accelerating his breath and lighting a white light in his brain; and Childe Harold ran beside him gurgling with the delight of a prep.-schoolboy; and Aylwin called out solemnly, "Well done, O'Grogan. Well done, Wimborne," as if he were older than either of them and captain of the team.

It was a short-lived triumph, for Sergeant Lewis, indignant that a team which contained no professional from Huddersfield Athletic should have scored the first goal, executed a mad and mighty rush of his own (and one not at all related to his true position in the field), and scored a thumping goal before anyone fully realized that the play had restarted. He did it rather as if he could do that sort of thing at any time when there was an urgent call upon him, and trotted back to his own place with a posse of Sergeants beside him clapping him between the shoulder-blades.

One goal all; and now the deluge; or rather, rush after rush by this side and the other, and then fierce frustration in front of the nervous goals. For every rush of the Sergeants there were two and more by the Officers, though all unavailing; and Tony could not doubt (had he wanted to, which he certainly didn't) that the honours were around his brows and Childe Harold's and those of the tireless Instructor, Aylwin. He was happy—electrically happy, and more than once his eyes swept the crowd to make sure that Moulden was there among the watchers.

Half-time, and the scores still level. Half-time over, and the teams arrayed again. "We've *got* 'em!" gurgled Childe Harold to Tony. "Their wind will give out soon now. They had to get ahead of us in the first half or be beaten. *I'm* not at all winded, are you? Look at 'em puffing and panting!

Look at the R.S.M.! We've got 'em, Bungay!—got 'em by the seat of their bags!"

"Why not say we've got them by their *pants?*" suggested Tony, and with this capital jest still warming him, he charged into the newly-opened play.

The excitement of the crowd was tremendous now; they had set their hearts, not so much on the Officers winning as on the Sergeants losing. And they yelled to the Officers to get on with it and win. Many a time that evening Tony was delighted to hear private soldiers, who normally would not address him without the mediacy of an N.C.O., shouting, "Go it, O'Grogan! that's the stuff to give 'em! Go it, O'Grogan! Let 'em see yer 'eels!" Or even in excessively humorous moments, "Go it, *Tony*, my man. Knock 'im dahn, the great 'ulking brute!" Often he heard the familiar brogue of Corporal Jim Stott uplifted in encouragement of his friends among the officers, though Jim Stott, like most of the N.C.O.s, was not at all sure that his sympathies weren't with the Sergeants. "That's reet, let him have it, lad. Oh, good lad, good lad! That's our Mr. O'Grogan, tha knows, of C Company; they're the lads! Good owd Noomber 9 Platoon!"

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" chorused a group of men who were pretending to be Gyppy coolies.

"Eh, but he's got it again—eh, take it along; tha can beat yon feller sure as muk—that's done him!" continued Jim Stott. "Eh, but he can play this game, our officer—he can and all! Whey, what's oop, lad? Tha mustn't be beaten by yon feller, the great soft chump. 'Ere! take his name and noomber!"

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!"

And sometimes Jim was encouraging the Sergeants in their own parade-ground fashion: "Get a move on now! Pick up your feet now; pick 'em oop!" And sometimes he was jeering at them: "Hey, lad, but hast tha never learnt this game? Where were tha fetcht oop? Aht Eccles way? Goom, Ah'd be ashamed to be beaten by a little 'un like that; he doan't look more nor ten year owd. . . ."

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!"

In the spells when the game was on the other side of the field and Tony could order his breath and think again, he gave thought to this extraordinary scene and found evidence in it of that strange, illogical, pragmatic wisdom of the British. This apparent upheaval, for an hour, of all discipline, smiled

upon by the officers and the N.C.O.s as they played their game, and by Colonel Tappiter who stood by watching with spectacles on nose, would it not have scandalized the Germans and the French, and yet did it not, in the long run, make for discipline? Men could not stomach too much repression; and so, in this legalized outburst of ribaldry, let resentments which else might fester under the skin escape in laughter! Oh yes, as often he had enthusiastically proclaimed to Scrase, there would be only one army which, from beginning to end of this test of endurance called the World War, would never sicken with mutinies; and this army, just because it was the best-natured, would win in the end.

True, no doubt; but the business immediately to hand was to win this match. And confound it, the second half was wearing away, and the light was wearing away, and the score still stood at "One all." Something must be done about it. "Oh, one more goal! One more goal, Bungay!" cried Childe Harold in a prep.-school agony. "Just one more goal!"

"Right you are!" Tony promised. "Certainly."

"Gee, we must win, we must win, we must beat the blighters!" Harold explained.

"We will. Dinna fash yersel'," said Tony.

"Yes, but there's only ten minutes more," bewailed the Childe.

"It is enough," said Tony royally.

And even as he spoke, a voice from behind, the voice of the self-appointed Instructor, Aylwin, shouted, "Christ! There you are, O'Grogan!" and the ball from off the Instructor's boot shot twenty yards down the field from Tony. He raced for it; and Sergeant Perrin, of the other faction, raced for it. The touch-line chorused *fortissimo*. The game came racing after them. Tony had farther to run than the sergeant, but he ran much faster, and he deprived that gentleman of the ball with a whole three inches to spare, while a roar went up to the darkening sky. The ball is his now: he centres; Hughes has it—Crash!—the ball has hit the cross-bar, which shivers as if only a hair's-breadth this side of splintering—Damn!—the chance has gone, but no, the ball has rebounded into play and Childe Harold is on it—*Plonk!*

Oh Hallelujah! *Goal!*

That'll be the end. Only five minutes more, and the Officers

will keep the Sergeants out of their goal like men inspired. The whistle—at last the whistle—and Tony's hands fall forward to his knees as he gasps, "Oh my God. I'm just about done, aren't you?"

"Three cheers for the Sergeants," calls Hughes Anson—ho, but one has wind for *that*, by Jove! Everywhere it is given with a will, the men who have got their wish and their piastres (some of them) adding a few hundred voices to its volume and sending some caps into the air.

"Three cheers for the Awficers!" calls Sergeant Lewis.

Let 'em go, boys; and then all troop home, for the evening star is over the dune.

CHAPTER III

THE ASSEMBLY BEATS

IN the mess that night after the Headquarters officers had withdrawn, Hughes Anson led the celebrations: he led them as rosily as he had led the Forward Line on the field; to be sure, he led those who would be his forwards now right through the pleasant goal of intoxication. In this new game Tony may be said to have played half-back while Scrase remained at full-back and Moulden stayed on the touch line. Childe Harold, on the other hand, was a forward every whit as inflamed as his leader.

"One more whisky," said Rosy, "and I shall be reasonably tight—John, bring another whisky—and then I think I shall make a speech."

"Oh hell, no!" hiccoughed Childe Harold. "Blazes, no! Play the game!"

"Well then, Aylwin shall—Aylwin the Authority. Aylwin shall explain the game of Soccer to us and where we went wrong, and how we can do better next time." He hammered for Aylwin on the table. "Aylwin, Aylwin, Aylwin."

"Aylwin'll see you damned first," said that astonishing youth. "You're drunk."

"What!" exclaimed Hughes. "*What!* May your house be destroyed and your religion perish." In compliment to these times and these places Hughes had long been specializing in Arabian curses. "I'm not drunk, father of sin. At least, not half so drunk as the Childe."

"Well, come on then," shouted Harold, who, being a very ordinary youth, thought it a fine thing to outstrip his seniors in the ways of the world. "Catch me up. I'll wait for you to cash me up."

"Right! Here goes!" Hughes tossed off another glass of whisky. "Ah! that's given me quite a lift. Now I *do*

feel rather rich. Fruity, you know. Allah is merciful. Now I think I shall make my speech."

The "Yes, yes!" of several officers quite drowned the Childe's "For pity shake no."

"The Ayes have it," Hughes announced; "Allah is good;" and without rising, he began: "Well, gentlemen, I propose to you the health of the Sergeants of this battalion—our splendid, our magnificent—I would almost say, our corking Sergeants——"

"*Un*-corking," Tony suggested.

"*Un*corking is suggested by Lieutenant Tono Bungay. That may or may not be apposite, but it is a custom in this mess for a pun to be paid for by drinks all round. That's so, isn't it, Mr. Vice?—John, bring some more whisky and put it down to Mr. O'Grogan. Well, gentlemen, this question of the Sergeants uncorking: I would have come to it, had not Bungay taken the words out of my mouth, curse his father. And may his mother's tomb be defiled. I was going to observe first, what may or may not have been observed before, that the N.C.O.s are the backbone of the British Army. Take that part, however, as said—you know how it goes——"

"Backbone of Brish Army," supplied Harold, immediately and redundantly.

Hughes looked at him; and, like the levite and the priest, left him in his present condition and continued his journey: "I say now it was a privilege, gentlemen, a privilege to meet these sergeants in battle and to give 'em such a hiding, curse their fathers. For though we only beat 'em by one goal, the initiative was ours from the first minute to the last, and we maintained a steady offensive—I mean to say, we were on top of 'em—absolutely on top of 'em—really. Does anyone deny that?"

No one did.

"Certainly not. Allah is just. And this great, this signal victory was due in no small measure to the achievements of our latest recruit, H. Wimborne, commonly called Childe Harold, who, if he knows nothing about soldiering, can at least play football, which is much more important." (Cheers.)

"Oh, shut up!" muttered Wimborne, abashed.

"Eh?—what? Shut up yourself. May your religion perish. Am I making this speech or are you? To the achievements of Harold, I said, and to those of Bungay on his wing"

—(Cheers)—" and of those of myself as centre forward. . . . Thank you, gentlemen. Allah reward you, and may your night be happy and blessed. . . . Yes—and—er—and here it may not ill become me to tell you that to-day chances to be also the birthday of young Harold "— (" Not really ! Liar ! ") —" and he, I cannot doubt, will shortly do the perfect gentleman by us and enable us to wet the occasion suitably. But that, sir "—no one was quite clear who the " sir " might be— " that, sir, is by the way. About these bloody sergeants : I propose—I mean, what's wrong with sending 'em along a crate of beer ? " (Loud endorsements.) " There's a lot of that foul Japanese stuff, of course ; but I suggest, sir, that we send 'em a dozen of Dog's Head brand. John—John, come here ! How are we off for beer ? Is there enough of . . ."

The speech had nose-dived very abruptly into a business conversation with John Stevens, the mess corporal, as to the quantity of beer in the mess stores and the chances of further supplies coming up on the morrow's camels ; and during this murmured catechism Moulden stretched forth a hand and helped himself to some of the whisky provided by Tony. Moulden had remained at the table of the revellers, though wishing beyond doubt that he was anywhere else : it was the nature of the man to show to the world an outer wall that had no connection with his inner thoughts. He had smiled dutifully, but not happily, at the jocularity of the speaker, and had tapped the table with his knuckles when the plaudits sounded for Tony, though, probably, they had painfully fretted him. Now, since it was Tony's whisky, he lifted his glass to him and toasted, " Cheerio, O'Grogan. And congrats."

" Thanks," acknowledged Tony. " But *I* didn't do much. Harold is the lad."

" Not a bit more than you were. You were the fastest on the field—really. My aunt ! you can run."

Instantly a little bullet of doubt lodged in Tony's brain and ached there. Had the fellow meant anything by the word ? Oh no, no ; it was a word natural enough.

" I'm not as fast as I used to be," he said poorly.

" Aren't you ? " Moulden's eyebrows lifted. " I only wish I could run half as fast—really. It's a useful accomplishment in the army."

Tony's control slipped ; he had had his whisky with the others.

"The devil!" he flashed. "What do you mean by that?"

Silence froze the company, and all eyes turned on him and Moulden.

"Damn! nothing," assured Moulden with a laugh, though averting his eyes. "Can't you stand a joke? You *do* rise to it."

"I don't!" denied Tony, yet more feebly. Sickening almost to tears, he knew that he had blundered again: he had betrayed to all what he was thinking; he had reminded them all of the half-forgotten story against him. To-morrow the thirty officers would be discussing this passage between him and Moulden.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," said Moulden, pursuing his advantage. "But I'm blowed if I see how—really."

"Oh, don't you!" sneered Tony, for he could only follow the road he had taken.

"No. Come, come." Moulden raised his glass again. "Cheerio, old man; and all the best to you. I mean: you mustn't be as sensitive as that."

He smiled at Tony, who glared back.

Neither spoke again; and Hughes Anson, who had been staring from one to the other, announced brightly, "Well, that's over. Allah is just. Now about this beer for the Sergeants."

The general cheerfulness survived for a month or two; but all the time the desert was encroaching upon it. Slowly, steadily, the power of the desert came out from its illimitable distances and spread weariness and depression over the camps. With the torrid months of April, May and June, the power heightened: an intense heat came off the burning dunes and hit men's flesh like the hot breath from a horse's nostrils; a glare came off the whitened sands and bullied their eyes and forced an ache across their brows; and out of the north-west, persistently, came a wind, carrying the driven sand into all things—into food and drink and beds, eyes and mouths and ears. There was no letting down the flies of the tents to resist its entry, or the oven-heat beneath the canvas would have been unbearable. Even so, even with the flies rolled up, the candles dissolved out of sight like ghosts, leaving only their

wicks behind, for their tallow would melt in a noontide hour and percolate away through the sand. From the doors of their tents men could watch the heat rising off the ground in a glassy and trembling haze, as an invisible gas rises; and behind this gauzy nothing the scrub patches or the telegraph posts trembled like palsied limbs. And from the tops of the dunes they could see the mirage at play between earth and heaven creating lakes and blue islands and rippling seas where, in truth, lay nothing but the wilderness.

Cynically the desert was shaping them into dulled creatures of itself. The desert was the earth in apathy; and in these men, who sought against nature to dwell and flourish there, it induced the accommodating apathy. They became physically apathetic. With no more enthusiasm than that shown by victims of forced labour, men and officers did their marches, padding like camels over the sand; they manned their outposts, dug their fortifications, and when a dangerous mist overlaid everything, stood to arms in them; they rebuilt the trenches as often as, with great sand-slides, their walls collapsed; but, on dismissal, they retired to their roasted tents where they reclined in listlessness or sleep, as inanimate as the desert itself. They became intellectually apathetic. No longer was there any written or spoken word that forced a mental effort. The books, such as could be got, were the lightest of novels; and the conversation at meals trifled around the revetting of trenches, the mismanagement of the mess, the latest bawdy story, the rag-time character of the dud British army, and the thanks due to God that Britain had a navy. All were agreed that Johnny Turk would not come now in the depth of the hot season, and therefore this was no longer warfare but mere playing at soldiers; and they, a division of Peninsula veterans, ought to go to France immediately, and leave these bloody desert outposts to a few patrols of Boy Scouts. Intellectuals like Scrase and Tony knew that their faculties were now so enervated that profundity of thought and fluency of expression would have to be cultivated anew when they returned to the places of civilization. Their minds were becoming fruitless as the desert.

Twice the outer world reached them. One April day a gorgeous General, plump and shining from his headquarters in a Cairo hotel, came out to inspect them, with a cavalcade of staff officers behind him, and a pennon taking the north-west

wind in front. They escorted him around all their little sights, and he seemed as interested as a child who was being shown Nelson's *Victory* for the first time. Hughes Anson avouched that when the cavalcade passed a certain wall of sacking, which screened an oblong space privily withdrawn to the camp's rear, the General pointed at it with his crop and inquired what manner of place it might be. It was the men's latrines, said Colonel Tappiter. "Oh, excellent! excellent!" exclaimed the General; and Colonel Tappiter nodded agreement, saying, "Yes, it was quite a good idea." Another day came a G.R.O. announcing the Gallipoli awards. They were amazingly generous; Serbia had offered a large helping of her "Orders of the White Eagle" for distribution among the British who had fought on the Peninsula, and something had to be done with them. Almost every officer of the 15th R.W.E.s who had stayed with them to the end received a White Eagle. Moulden had one and Grimsby. Scrase and Hughes Anson received the higher honour of the Military Cross. So did Padre Quickshaw: mainly, it was believed, because he had come off the Peninsula, on the night of the evacuation, sitting on a crate of whisky for the Brigadier. Colonel Tappiter received a C.B.

The 15th had Quickshaw into the Mess to wet his Military Cross; but he pooh-poohed it and all their White Eagles too. "They're nothing to pat oneself on the back about," he said. "I happen to know what happened—haw, haw! There was a blooming clerical error at G.H.Q.—just what you'd expect. They made out two lists of names: one of those officers who deserved medals, and another of those who deserved to be sent home—and of course they got 'em jumbled up and forwarded the second list to the Department of Awards, or whoever it is that issues out this junk. I'm not at all sure that I shall wear my ribbon, meself." All were delighted with this story and declared that it was undoubtedly the true explanation of their medals.

There was no medal for Tony: not even a mention in the dispatches. His friends, of their tact, forbore from all comment, but their kindly silence was harder to bear than comment. And some of the men, to his knowledge, pointed the omission and grumbled in his honour. "Why *he* didn't get summat," said Corporal Stott, "Ah never could reckon oop meself. He had more plook and more brains nor most of them, and 'appen that's t'reason why." "I'd have given to *'im* before

that there Moulden," said Fred Roberts, and forthwith relieved his loyalty to Mr. O'Grogan by a very long and very sour defamation of Moulden's character, who had rebuked him that day for an untidy kit. "Mr. O'Grogan's a gentleman, whatever else he may be," he concluded.

The day the awards were published Tony went into his tent and wrote to Honor:

"*My Dearest,*

"*I wonder what you are doing now as I write to you. It's 120 in the shade here—only there isn't any shade—and about 520 in one's tent, so I am missing you and Jill and Peggy and Joyce more than I can say. It is difficult writing: the khamsin is blowing, and the fog of flying dust carries away the paper as I write on it. And I have to get up every ten minutes to make lemonade, owing to the dipsomania the heat induces. Which reminds me—as you love me, send some lemonade powder and crystals and invite Jill and Peggy and Joyce to go and do likewise. Nothing's happening here; and I want to get to a livelier campaign after five months' waiting for the Turks. You know, there is such a thing as the lure of the shells. If you once get gripped by their fascination you can't listen to the artillery practising here without wishing that it were the real thing—without feeling a kind of homesickness for the shells. At least, I do. It may be a kind of perverted appetite for thrills, but it's just what I feel. So let's hurry up with that move to France, and I shall get leave! I am wanting you dreadfully, would you believe it? Write and tell me something about the war. . . .*"

There was no move to France. One sultry night of July there flashed from Headquarters in Cairo to Leigh Post in Sinai the call to arms. Aerial reconnaissance had reported the Turks massing in force with guns and stores and camels east of Romani. Romani was the railhead of a full-gauge railway which, starting from El Kantara on the Canal, had been pushed twenty miles into the desert. Turks massing east of Romani! Aylwin explained everything to everybody: this meant that they had come across the Sinai Peninsula from their base at El Arish, hugging the Mediterranean, and would attempt the Canal at Kantara.

And it was July. They had belied all prophecies, defied all precedents, and come in the hot season. Was this their strategic surprise, or had the Somme Battle far away in France (as Aylwin

asserted—nay, knew) forced their hand? When Colonel Tappiter, that torrid July night, came into the mess with news that the battalion would abandon Leigh Post in the morning and march through midsummer heat to the Canal bank, it chanced that the little scratching gramophone was playing "The Blue Dragoons." "For God's sake," he laughed, "stop that thing! We shall have blue dragoons enough to-morrow. Listen, everybody."

CHAPTER IV

EVE OF ROMANI

NEXT morning the 15th Royal West Essex were marching in column-of-route back to the Canal; while behind them, at Weymann's Dump, now dismantled and tumbled over the sand, the sweating, cursing, sacrilegious fatigue parties loaded up the pack-mules in a heat like the heat from furnace doors. All and everything were for Kantara.

From the minute the Turk said "Check!" to Kantara, that little bridge-head on the Asiatic side of the Canal had become the hub of Egypt's defences. The shock at Kantara, like an earthquake shock, had sent its message radiating over the Mediterranean world. It was at once felt at Zeitoun, near Cairo, in whose training camps and schools every man of the Sinai Divisions received orders to rejoin his unit without delay; it was felt at Sidi Bishr, near Alexandria, in whose holiday camps all resting troops heard with dismay that their rest was curtailed and they must return immediately, and all unemployed officers detained there learned that they were attached to regiments operating in Sinai; it was felt on the quays of Egypt, where individual officers and drafts of men awaiting transport to take them on leave to England, swore bitterly when told that their leave was cancelled and their return ordered; it was felt at Marseilles where bronzed and happy soldiers of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, disembarking to journey across France to England, had to execute an about-turn and take ship for the posts they had left; and it was felt in the ubiquitous Navy, whose ships loomed up in those waters of the Mediterranean that bathe the northern coast of Sinai, and there stood by, against the day when they would be required to shell the communications of the Turk.

And between Leigh Post and the Canal a column of khaki men went washing through the soft sand.

With it, at the head of one of its companies, went Captain Scrase and Lieut. O'Grogan, ploughing and stumbling side by side. Scrase had given his mount to his groom to ride, professing no reason; but Tony had guessed the reason: Scrase had decided that, if he must order his men to forge through hot sand under an Egyptian midsummer sun, so that each man trod in the sweat of his fellows ahead, then he must prove to them from in front that it could be done. Tony even charged him with it, adding picturesquely, "We're laying the dust for them with our own sweat;" to which Scrase instantly mumbled a demurrer: "I'd as soon march as ride," he said.

In Tony, despite the glare aching across his forehead, and the sweat saturating his helmet, and the haversack abrading his shoulders, there was an eagerness, an impatience, which excited a curious smarting in his throat. It sprang first from that irrational delight in the sheer fact of war which he had discovered in himself; and secondly from the swelling thought, "Now, *now*, is my chance." In a day or two, after he had performed some magnificent heroism in the battle, he would have exchanged the murmurs of disapproval for a chorus of praise. And thereafter all would be well, for among these unimaginative, sheep-like public-schoolboys the legend of his bravery would root as toughly as the legend of his "cold feet." Oh, he might be killed in the effort, of course, but what of that? Strange, bewilderingly strange, that so small a matter as the praise or blame of his neighbours should drive him more powerfully than the instinct for life itself!

Such was Tony's secret, very secret, thought, under a helmet limp with sweat: what was Scrase's? From the moment the alarm had sounded there had been nothing in Scrase to hint that an obsession of his own had leapt to its mastery, except a tendency to raise thoughtful eyebrows and to lapse into long silences during which he swallowed intermittently. His handling of the company and all his movements were prompt and efficient. He laughed often—but was there not at times a hitch, a gulp in his laughter?

Behind with their platoons came Moulden, Childe Harold and Aylwin, the two young ones marching to their first battle. One shuddered to contemplate what manner of authority on battles Aylwin would become, if he survived.

In front, at the head of A Company, rode Hughes Anson. He rode; he did not march with his men like Scrase. "Not

I," he had declared. "Some bright spark said that the man was a public benefactor who made two blades of grass grow instead of one; but the lad for my money is the lad who arranges that only one man shall be tired instead of two." And at that he put his foot in his stirrup and swung aloft on his big bay mare, with a word of praise for Allah.

And at the head of the whole column rode Colonel Tappiter, all his natural kindliness shut out of sight behind his iron Bismarck jaw and his steeled Ludendorff eyes. It was a theory of Scrase's that the Colonel's very fine jaw, of which he could only be proud, was the source of all his attempted Prussianism, but whether such was the case or not, beyond doubt he was resolving now that his battalion should go into battle as a battalion ought to go: a single furious instrument, whose component men reckoned themselves nothing and the instrument everything. Why be a soldier at all if you held that anything less than this was the truth about a battalion?

Yes, why?

On the far side of the Canal a train should have been waiting to rush them northward to Kantara; but there was no train in sight when they arrived; only the railway line, a Railway Transport Officer and the desert. The Colonel cursed the R.T.O., and the R.T.O. submitted deferentially that there was congestion up north in the vicinity of Kantara, and he could not promise a train for hours—if at all, that day. So the Colonel turned about and wrathfully permitted the men to bathe when the sun had mellowed. During that bathe and afterwards when the men were lolling on the bank, huge black troopships came down the Canal, all packed with yellow soldiers; one after another they came, their bows to the south, heading for India and Mesopotamia. And an imbecile humour played between the Canal banks and the deck rails.

"'Oo are you?" came a voice from the bank.

"The Cheshires, begorra."

"Send us some cheese, then."

"Why, who are you?" demanded the ship.

"Alexander's Rag-time Band!"

"Are you fighting anyone?"

"Nah!" The bank denied it. "We're consumptives taking a fresh-air cure. Where are you going in that tub?"

"Blighty!" came the unhesitating response; which was not

without its pathos, for the ship's bows were turned away from England.

"Gahn! Abaht turn then!—" here were the unmistakable accents of Joe Wylie—"You're on the wrong road. . . . Well, goo'bye. 'Ope it keeps fine for yer."

"Goo'bye. Are we down-hearted?"

"Not 'arf!"

Then came another transport on whose 1st Class deck was a ravishing cluster of sisters in grey and red.

"Ow!" shouted Joe. "Ow, I say! Look at the s'nice s'nurses!" And to the men aboard he called, "Hi! 'oo are you? Are you the latest war-babies from England?"

"Aye, that's about it. What are you doing there?"

"We're the Royal West Essex. We're the boys that matter."

"Well, don't you know there's a war on?"

"Gahn! We were at war before you were born. Who are you?"

"Worcesters and Warwicks."

"Oh, you're no bloody good. Where are you going?"

"Mespot."

"You'll get hell there all right. Goo'bye."

"Cheerio, chum."

"Chin chin."

In the passage of the ships Tony found much to stir him. Here were the lines of two very different battles crossing each other in an Eastern desert, and at the point of contact rose the voice of London—of Manchester—of Birmingham; a voice no different to-day from what it was two years ago, in 1914; no different here from what it was in the Mile End Road; facetious, unperturbed, the voice of a people who were still content after two years of disaster and deadlock to cruise about the seas—which of course belonged to them by prescriptive right—in pursuit of some sort of victory, somewhere and someday—and taking their football with them.

"By gosh!" he thought, in a sudden vivid appreciation. "I'm with 'em all the way. I'm with 'em to the end."

The train came at dawn, and rolled away with them northward along a line running parallel with the Canal. Except for the belt of palm and sycamore trees with which the Sweet Water Canal clothed its banks, and except for infrequent clusters of Arab mud huts, the desert stretched to the horizon left and right of the rails. And the train ambled on, and

evening came down upon the whole vast area, inundating it with the hues of sunset. Blue darkness ousted all these colours, and the train slipped in behind the square, white buildings of Ismailia; and thence, in the thickening night, bowled on to El Ferdan.

At El Ferdan the battalion detrained and unloaded. Tony dossed down on a stack of baggage, but his sleep was uneasy: all night the movements of troops disturbed him; he heard horses trotting, and camels padding with bells a-tinkle, and voices shouting commands. Telephones buzzed and dispatch riders panted away. The 16th Lancashires passed: he knew from their voices that they had marched on sudden orders from Ismailia and were going on through the night to Kantara. And the 14th Fusiliers went by, having left their tents standing—so they shouted to someone—for by dawn they must be at Kantara. Once in the night there came from behind him a comment on all this movement—Art Webster's voice: "Christ! El Ferdan's 'ell-fer-leather, ain't it?"

Next day, July the 21st, some copies of the local paper, *The Egyptian Mail*, circulated speedily among the officers and the men. Well they might, for in this paper the news was given to the world: a heavy-type headline streamed across the whole of the front page, "Turkish Division Approaching the Canal." Truly there was something stimulating to the soldiers in that headline. It gave reality and immediacy to the approaching fight: the simpler of them seemed to realize for the first time what was happening; and they were satisfied enough.

That day the remaining battalions of the Royal West Essex Brigade concentrated with the 15th; and at midnight, in complete darkness, a column of four thousand men began its twelve-mile march to Kantara. It was still dark when, halting by Kantara's pontoon bridge, the men for the most part lay down on the bank to contrive some sleep. At sunrise the pontoon bridge was swung across the Canal; and with whistling and singing and mild cursing, the Brigade clattered over its woodwork and found itself on a white road between unnumbered tents and hangars. It was Kantara.

Here once more they must halt and wait. But it was a rare good wait, this one, brimming with talk and interest. All day long battalion after battalion, in full fighting kit, marched up the military road and added their mass to the great

concentration of troops that was packing the threatened position. Probably within the last twenty-four hours forty thousand had forgathered here. Units that the Essex never knew to be in Egypt converged from different parts of the Protectorate upon the pontoon bridge of Kantara and came swinging along, one behind the other, to allotted positions on the Asiatic side of the Canal. Aeroplane after aeroplane rose like birds from cover and dwindled away eastward to spy out the Turk. Aeroplanes from other flights and squadrons, dispersed along the Canal, came bearing in, like homing pigeons to reinforce Kantara's aerodrome. Ambulance wagons from an assembly near the bridge-head, purred past—to a cheer—going as far as the road would take them, to meet the incoming casualties; and all knew then that the cavalry must be in effective contact with the enemy. Towards evening a throb as of distant howitzers troubled the air.

At dark the brigade dragged itself to its feet and marched but a little way into the open desert, where the serpentine column broke up into constituent parts, and each battalion went off at an angle to its appointed resting-place and came to a halt as a single square of men. Arms were piled, packs and equipment doffed, and perspiring foreheads wiped. Here they were to sleep, by the piled arms. The smoking field kitchens fed the 15th with tea and stew, and Quartermaster Weymann distributed his jam and fresh bread.

"A real Blighty meal, ain't it?" said a grateful soldier.

Then by the light of its cigarettes the battalion lay down and sang a song or two, before allowing the silence of the wilderness to wrap it in sleep.

A wonderful thing, a thousand men asleep together. The stars looked down upon the little pyramids of their piled arms, arrayed in parallel straight lines, and upon the solitary figures of the sentries, who alone stood upright with shining bayonets, or abruptly sloped arms, and moved to and fro.

And all this while, with the waning of a moon that hung in the sky like the crescent of Islam, the great Fast of Ramadan was drawing to its close. What of it? Only that the Faithful, confident of Allah's propitiation by their month of ascetic piety, would wait for the death of the moon and then smite

the enemies of the Prophet with the virtues of the Fast of Ramadan.

Dawn, and orders for the brigade to proceed at once to Hill 40, a post many miles in the desert, and lying south of the threatened railhead of Romani. A drink of tea from the cookers, and the column reformed and took the white military road that lay like a ribbon on the undulating yellow sand. The sun came up, with majestic indifference, and poured upon them such a heat as they had never before known—or so it seemed to them that day. The road scorched and drove its heat through the heavy soles of their army boots. Panting, the men toiled forward with jaws drooping and the white dust caking on lips and gums and teeth. All singing died out and joking ceased; and men had scarcely heart to mutter their curses. From the battalion in front, the 14th, the weaker men, weighted with their packs and rifles and ammunition, began to fall by the way.

The spirit of the 15th was better. It held. Its long column rumbled with seditious murmurings, but it jogged on, intact—possibly because it had Colonel Tappiter in front and Joe Wylie somewhere behind. The one of these was astringent and the other laxative; and a happy alternation or blending of these remedies, we suppose, can make for equilibrium; so the 15th jogged on, with never a man—no, not the profanest—falling out. Joe, with his varicose vein, limping forward on bandy legs at the tail of C Company—his long nose and his loose moustache greyed with dust—Joe was the only one now to raise his voice in ribaldry. And it was not his words that amused his comrades so much as the fact that old Joe's voice had uttered them and his delighted laugh had followed them. There seemed no doubt that a gangrene had attacked the 14th in front, for it was dropping its men behind as rapidly as a torn sack will drop its knobs of coal; which provided Joe with the chance for an unspeakable comment in which the word "No. 9" and a medical term for visceral looseness were the fine point for humour. This pleasantry was passed along the line of the 15th, as it plodded grimly on; and the 15th grunted a laugh and stumbled on. They passed a group of six men of the 14th who had fallen out and were sitting down in the

desert scrub; and Joe chaffed them: "Git yer blankets aht, me lads; git dahn to it. Revally at 5.30 in the morning." They passed another group, and Joe cried: "Gaw! look at that little lot! Got yer cards, mates? You've a four there, ain't yer? . . . And 'ere's some more! Shall we be sendin' the car for yer?" and for this patter he was consigned to hell by the dispirited backsliders, but it drew from the stickers, as they jogged on, their rumbles of laughter, and they found strength to—jog on.

"Bungay," said Kit Scrase to Tony beside him.

"Yes?" inquired Tony.

"Have you ever considered, Bungay, what the Funny Man of a regiment is worth to the country?"

"No," answered Tony, "but we had just such another in the Lancashires."

"Well, Kipling said some time ago that the soul of a battalion resided in its band. I should like to argue it out with him, if you can arrange a meeting. I've a strong suspicion that it's in the keeping of the Funny Man."

Perhaps it is. When at the half-hours and the clock-hours the column "fell out on the right of the road" for its few minutes' rest, and the flesh of men's knees, exposed by the drawn-up shorts, began to sting and inflame in the sun, Joe Wylie suddenly shouted, "S'truth! I can smell me knees cooking. Reminds me of me Sunday dinners at 'ome." When, the battalion marching again, Scrase walked up and down his company to encourage the men to endure, Joe called to him, "Not more than another eighty miles, is it, sir? Nah, barely that, is it, sir?" and Kit laughed and said, "Well, perhaps a *little* more, Wylie. Say eighty-five." "Yurse," accepted Joe. "I see, sir. *I* see. Nothing to speak of." And when Scrase towards the end of the day had assured them that Hill 40 was just over the next skyline, and when the company had topped that skyline and discovered that there was yet another far distant one to be reached, then there was a silence broken only by maledictions, till suddenly Joe uplifted his voice again, "Cheer up, me lucky lads. Only sixteen more skylines!" and the silence trembled into a wave of laughter, and the exhausted foot-sore men staggered on.

And all the day Colonel Tappiter cantered up and down his battalion that he might bark at the incipient loiterers like a sheepdog. He had no word of encouragement for the stickers:

they were but doing their job; and he paid them the tribute of his silence; but the grousers, the murmurers—if he but heard them, he charged up to revile them, even as Moses reviled his command when they murmured in these places. Fred Roberts came under his blast: at about the sixth hour Fred suddenly stated that it was not in him to march another yard, but he did not immediately fall out, contenting himself with a muttered repetition of his interesting pronouncement next time the Colonel rode by. Straight-about came the Colonel's horse and danced an alarming Charleston at Fred Roberts' side. "Fall out then!" roared the Colonel. "*Fall out if you want to*, but I promise you I'll send nothing and no one to fetch you in. You can lie here and rot if you like, or be captured by the Turks. You'll be as much good to them as you are to us. This battalion's no use for malingerers." And he clattered away.

"'E seems vexed," said the voice of Joe Wylie.

The Colonel out of sight, Fred Roberts reminded his hearers that commanding officers had been shot in the back before now, and that he didn't care how soon the Germans finished off the British Empire and won the ruddy war, because after it there'd be a ruddy revolution which would have all his support, Englishmen not being niggers or Germans to fall for this sort of thing; which observations delivered, he stumbled on, the sadness and the bewilderment fixed in his patient London face.

"Now *he's* vexed too," sighed Joe Wylie.

The 15th was still at full strength when, beneath a falling sun, the Brigade marched on to its camping ground at Hill 40. But the battalion in front had dropped 250 of its 900 men—which was a record, and some days later a Colonel went home to England. The 15th were kept on parade for a few minutes longer than the other battalions, which was matter for profanity, till the Brigadier rode up and congratulated them, declaring that they had been an example and an inspiration to the whole brigade. After that they dismissed, mumbling a ridicule of "that old b——'s eyewash;" but the bitterness in their hearts against Colonel Tappiter was melting away.

There was a halt of some days at Hill 40, because the Turks were coming very slowly over the heavy sands of Sinai. Rumour had it that they were dragging their guns along with

teams of oxen, while gangs of coolies ran ahead to lay timber planks beneath the wheels as the guns advanced. If so, they must be coming at a pace something less than a funeral's, and might be in sight, so Art Webster surmised, the week before Christmas.

At Hill 40 "Little Willie" Sparrow bade the regiment good-bye, not without embarrassment, and left them. Two years he had marched and fought and endured with them, and he was still only seventeen years old. He had a right to go home, and had claimed his right. Eight weeks before, when he was wretched with sand-fever at Leigh Post, he had walked unhappily into the Orderly Room and reported his true age and asked if he might go home. His mother was ill, he said, and he was her sole support, and he would come out again —he would really—when he was of service age. He had stuck it out, he added, for two years—or would have done before he went, because he had joined on August 5th, 1914, and it would probably take a couple of months for his discharge to come through. . . . But if they couldn't manage this for him, it didn't matter, thanks very much. . . . The Orderly Room had no course but to forward his application, and now his answer was come. Now when it wanted but a few days to the Fourth of August! Fate, having heard the boy's forecast, had obeyed it almost to the hour and cynically tossed him his notice to quit, on the very eve of a battle.

Things happened like that in the army, his officer, Lieut. O'Grogan told him; and this officer knew it only too well. Perhaps Tony was a little surprised, when the boy came to say his farewells, to observe how much less sharp was young Sparrow's worry over this most inopportune recall than his own had been when a like mischance befell him. There was anxiety in Willie's manner, but it was submerged beneath his joy and excitement at the thought of his home and his Southend pavements, his mother and his girl. Natural, no doubt: a stray bullet like this must injure an officer far more seriously than a humble private.

"I could wish it had come at any other time," said Willie, "but that's not my fault, is it, sir?"

"Certainly not."

"I think the men'll understand that, don't you, sir?"

"They will if they're not imbeciles."

"Yes, but they *are* imbeciles sometimes, aren't they?" said

Willie, smiling. "They'd rather believe the nasty thing than the sensible one."

Tony, treasuring his high estimate of the men, hated to have it shaken; even though——

"If that's so," he argued, "they don't do it out of malice, but because they like a spicy story."

"Yes, but it's rather bad luck," grinned Willie, "on him who happens to be the subject of the story——"

"And served up with the spice! It is," Tony admitted; quickly he changed his argument. "And then again, you must remember that it's the only way they have, poor fools, of expressing their loyalty."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean: they won't express aloud their determination to stick out this little trouble—which simply isn't done, you know—so they do it by accusing others of malingering. A very curious race of men! Very."

"But will they say that of me, sir?"

"No, no," Tony lied promptly. "Your position's rather exceptional."

"Well, good-bye, sir; and thanks most awfully for all your kindness."

"Good-bye, Willie."

"But I shall see you again, sir. I'm coming back one day. I promised *that*."

"*Saïda*, Willie. *Salaam aleykum*."

On the third day of their halt the 15th was paraded to hear an address from its Colonel. Colonel Tappiter sat his caracoling horse in front of them, and struggled alternately with that fiery brute and with his own inarticulateness.

"It's possible, men," he shouted, "that within forty-eight hours we shall be—er—in conflict with the Turk, and I'm sure that by fighting like the devil you'll—you'll—you'll do damn well. The 15th, confound it, made a bit of a name on the Peninsula, and now we have a chance of winning new—'new laurels,' I think the phrase goes—and, dammit, we'll do it. Talking about the Peninsula, nothing can alter the fact that the Turk thinks he beat us there, fair and square. Well, I've not much use for his thinking that, and I don't expect you have, either. God, no! In short—in fact—we owe him one, and he's going to get it this time, fair and square. I can't tell you—damn you, you brute" (this to the horse), "*stand*, will

you?—I can't tell you all the strategy of this battle, but take my word for it, there's a trap waiting for the Turks and they're going to walk into it, fair and square—God! that man two from the left! don't you know how to stand properly at ease, man; pull your knee in. What the devil do you think this is? A Bible Class?—The Turks'll walk into it, and we shall collect them in their thousands—not a doubt of it! And in that way we shall remove all danger to the Canal for a long time to come. Then we shall probably take the initiative—*stand*, you brute—and begin an advance into the Holy Land, which ought to be damn interesting. Talking about the Canal, you saw, didn't you? our ships going down it to India and Mespot, and you'll see why we can't have the Turk sitting across it. . . . So what's wrong with driving him helter-skelter back to his own country? You may have to wait a bit here; but whether you're waiting or whether you're marching, or whether you're giving the Turk what-for, you are already taking your part in the Battle of Romani. You see? It's more or less begun, you see, and already you have your place—just here—in the disposition of forces that's arranged to—er—to—er—to win it. . . . Well, I think that's all. . . . Oh no! Bye the bye, you've all heard with joy of the good show put up by British troops in this great Somme business in France—including, mind you, several Essex Battalions—and God in heaven! it's up to us not to fall behind their standard. . . . Surely! . . . Oh, yes, I may as well tell you that, sooner or later, you are to be made into a Flying Column, which will probably mean two bloody awful hardships for you—some more marches like your last, and damn little water. Thank God *I* shan't have to walk across the desert, but then I'm much older than you—for Christ's sake stand *still*" (for such a sake the horse obeyed and stood perfectly still)—" old enough to be your father in most cases, but I'll take on the thirst, same as any of you, and—er—well, I feel sure the 15th will set an example to all the other units in the brigade as you did the other day. Yes, surely. On the march, I mean.—Dammit, I think that'll do, won't it?" This last remark was addressed in a lower voice to the Adjutant at his side, who nodded his verdict that it would do.

After this speech the battalion adjourned for breakfast; and the officers lifted up mugs of tea and toasted, " The Day! Der Tag! Der Tag! *Bow-wow*," in the flippant British way.

The forty-eight hours passed, and many more, during which they weeded out the unfit men, reduced their kit, and dressed for their character as a Flying Column. Their iron rations were overhauled, and their first field dressings, and their iodine ampuls; and they were given each man a bottle of water purifiers. The water-bottles were to be kept full, and anyone drinking from them without orders would be immediately put under arrest.

And every night they rehearsed the Flying Column.

At Hill 40 there was trouble with Padre Quickshaw. Padre Quickshaw was now Senior Chaplain of the whole Division, but he had refused to live as far back as Divisional Headquarters, and was still attached to the brigade to which he had ministered rebuke for so long. He was still the "temporary" secretary of B.H.Q. mess who purposed to resign to-morrow—as he had been any time in the last two years. During the six months that B.H.Q. had sat on the Canal banks he might often have been seen walking among its tents in a cracked pith helmet and a crumpled black cassock with the M.C. ribbon on its breast; but now that they had taken to the road again the cassock was folded up and he was usually discovered in a pair of tommy's shorts, a pale yellow shirt void of any badges of rank, and the cracked helmet. Like Scrase, he had trudged every step of the way in the recent marches, giving his horse to his groom. Therefore it was hardly to be expected that he would submit to what happened now.

What happened now was this: on the establishment of the Flying Columns, in view of the fact that every gallon of water had to be carefully considered, an order was issued that chaplains must not accompany their units, but must remain behind on the Dumps.

Did you ever hear the like? Quickshaw, his lips spluttering acerbity and his resentful eyes starting out of his head, met the insolent order with such sedition and rebellion as only he, by grace of the amused affection in which he was held—and be damned to that nonsense too!—could have initiated without being promptly cashiered. Roughly it may be said that he turned the back of his cassock upon the approaching enemy and his face to Divisional Headquarters in the rear, and opened

three concurrent campaigns in that direction: the first an Indignation Campaign, in which he demanded if anyone thought the fifteen padres of the division had left their parishes at home to come out and sit on the men's unwanted socks and pants, and whether they were to be held as less worth their water than the meanest mule; the second a Pathos Campaign, in which he offered their services as stretcher-bearers—or as batmen to their colonels—batmen, he added caustically, who would bumsuck with the best; and the third a Flat Defiance Campaign, in which he announced that they would go with their men, with or without permission. All these offensives were stubbornly repulsed at Headquarters with the reply that the establishment of the Flying Columns was final, and if chaplains accompanied them they would be deprived of such carnal things as water and meat, which possibly the Lord would provide. To this Quickshaw retorted, with more spirit than sense, that it took two parties to a contract to say whether it was final, and that the Lord for the moment wasn't in this—he'd see to it himself; and forthwith he dispatched a clear-line wire to the Principal Chaplain at G.H.Q.—as to a person of greater objective reality and more immediate effectiveness, in the eyes of an army, than the Deity—requesting him to lay the whole case before the Commander-in-Chief. Whether it was the outcome of this wire or not, none knew, but a supplementary order announced that one chaplain only should accompany the division and he the senior of them. This leaving fourteen out in the cold, and giving, moreover, an unfair advantage to the C. of E., Quickshaw nobly refused to accept it, and, after inquiring of Division when they would realize that there were denominational differences among the men, sat down to pen his request that, since August the 4th was at hand and his second year completed, he might be at once relieved of his commission and allowed to return to England. But before it was dispatched G.H.Q. surrendered, and all the chaplains were ordered—actually *ordered*—to proceed with their units. And under Quickshaw's instructions they interpreted this order in its widest sense, taking with them their servants and grooms and horses, and—so Authority affirmed, giving a last fatuous thrust—a gravely excessive kit.

In the opening days of August, Hill 40 learned that the first phase of the battle had resulted in the retreat of the Australian

Light Horse before the enemy, who was already south and west of Romani.

A retreat, ye gods!—or was it (as Aylwin held—nay, knew) the trap? Trap or disaster, on Friday, August the 4th, the second anniversary of Britain's declaration of war, after a morning during which the booming of artillery had been rolling over the sand dunes, and official news had been circulated that for two days a battle had been in progress, the Essex Brigade received its orders to put itself in readiness to march.

CHAPTER V

BATTLE OF ROMANI

TONY had seen no parade quite like this one: a brigade falling in to march straight into battle; every man with a supply of firewood strapped on his pack and the knowledge in his face that he would not return till after the fight, if he returned at all.

With the 15th occupying the privileged position at the head of the column, the brigade started to plough through the sands. An hour, and Hill 40 was a league behind them; they were passing through the next post, known as Hill 70; and in doing so (thought Tony) were completing as fine a picture as artist could conceive of the Rear of the Fight. This post was less the slope of a hill than a wide inclination of the desert; and spotted all over it were the tents left empty by those who had gone out ahead. On either side of the central road stood serried lines of cavalry, the men standing at their animals' heads. Batteries of artillery stood ranked in readiness, the drivers astride their horses. Behind them stretched the Ammunition Columns. Beyond were countless camels, either seated in their parks, or formed in lines ready to trail off; each beast carrying twenty-five gallons of water in his two swinging tanks. And up the ribbon of road, between these arrays, tramped Tony's brigade, all its rifles slung behind the men's shoulders, so that their barrels pointed upward like bristles. And over all was the half-light of evening.

They were heading for Gilban, a post on the railway where they were to encamp for the night; and as the miles swung under their feet, many isolated troopers of the cavalry passed them, wandering in from the front. Mischievously these fellows assured them that the Australian Light Horse were *mafish* (finished) and that the Romani railhead had been blown to glory by German bombs. And the men, just as they

were the chief of grousers, so they enjoyed more than most things the possession of an ugly rumour: very strangely were they made. Soon the fate of the Light Horse, who had been cut up and annihilated, and the fate of Romani, which had been blown off the map, ran merrily down the column, prompting the satirists to express a hope that it would keep fine for them when they were being marched to the Turkish prisons at Damascus.

"Do they take us in chains?" shouted Joe Wylie. "Do they now?"

The humour of the situation put them in the best of spirits; and through the darkness they pursued their march towards the Terrible Turk with songs and whistling. Not "Rule, Britannia"; not any song of patriotism; and certainly not "Tipperary," which had been discarded immediately the newspapers made it into the Soldiers' Song; none of these did they sing; but in high chorus they invited someone to wash them in the water in which he washed his dirty daughter, that they might be whiter than the whitewash on the wall; or they proclaimed that they all lived at No. 24, and at No. 24 there was a knocker on the door; or they announced to the stragglers of Gilban that they were the New York swells, and they were respected wherever they might go. The only ditty at all bearing upon the war that they sang that night was "Keep the home fires burning till the boys come home."

At Gilban the scrub was so plentiful that it gave the desert by starlight the appearance of an English gorse-common. Through the scrub, straight as a latitudinal line, ran the railway to Romani. Tents left empty by those who had gone forward stood beside the railway; and the men who handed them over to the new-comers warned them to keep the flaps down because the place was infested with "snakes, spiders, scorpions, crabs, jellyfish and all sorts of other anny-miles." The tired marchers recked little of these things, and unrolled their blankets and "got down to it." It was a night of strange lights on the Romani front, and heavy firing, the guns increasing in intensity as the dawn broke.

The dawn brought the stunning blow to Tony. There went forth an order, past understanding by junior officers, that the four battalions of the brigade were to advance at once to the scene of the fighting, but each battalion only three companies strong; its fourth company was to remain at Gilban; and

Colonel Tappiter ordained that C Company should be the one to stay behind.

There could be no protesting; no seeking explanation from Colonel or Adjutant. All was hurried movement and shouted commands; and before Scrase and the others could fully realize that they had been denied the battle, the brigade had crowded into trains and rolled away.

"Cheated!" The word leapt to Tony's lips as he stood in the scrub and listened to the diminuendo of the trains. And the murmur of the battle beat along the horizon, in front of the dying rumble!

Damnation! was there ever such accursed luck? The stars in their courses . . . Gone now his chance to set up before the eyes of his brigade the real Lieut. O'Grogan, the fearless Lieut. O'Grogan . . . Yes, it was gone; all news this morning agreed that the infantry's battle would finish to-day: the Turk had been trapped and was only fighting for his escape; the retreat of the British had been nothing more than the recoil of a wave which was now rolling forward in a tidal success; it had lured the enemy from his wells, involved him hopelessly in the sand dunes and was now surrounding him. And here stood Tony, dropped like the excess baggage, miles behind the range of fire.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Yes, but no honour theirs, in the common mind. And it was the common mind that had wounded him and now occupied all his thoughts. Why, dammit, his lagging here, though it was only in obedience to orders, could probably be used by the evil-minded to underline the tale of his "cold feet." Says someone, but only in joke: "O'Grogan, I see, contrived to dodge the guns again," and the evil-minded pass on the word, but in their different voice. Thus it was done in the army.

Well, one could only laugh . . . and wait. . . . He mooned out into the desert, his head down; and gradually the sands beneath his eyes unveiled to him their wonderful interest, and he achieved for a while the detachment of a student. What a manuscript were these sands, thickly written over with the scholarship of the desert! He had thought of the desert as a dead world, and here, in a hundred tiny alphabets, ran the story that it was alive with life. Life rioted upon it—at least where the scrub abounded. There wriggled a long line—the track of a snake. There, in those pock-marks, the feet of a jerboa

had pressed. Here in this long stretch of Chinese writing the beetle had gone its way; and here in this chain of broad arrows, a bird had hopped. That zigzag line with dots accompanying it was the trail of a lizard leading to yonder little hole; this half-foot, half-claw mark was the impress of a chameleon—yes, there was the chameleon himself, yellow as he walked the sand and green as he climbed the scrub.

And everywhere this screed of nature was overlaid with the writing of war; with its footprints of men marching four abreast, its hoof-marks of trekking cavalry, its saucer-holes shaped by the padding transport camels, and its deeper cavities opened by the high-legged trotting camels of the Bikanir Corps. Pooh! What were these man-made prints but phenomena for the naturalist; in what were they different from the prints of the smaller fighting animals? Syrian humans, Assyrian, Chaldean, Greek, Roman, French, British had tramped their record on these sands, and imagined they were writing imperial history! Funny little squabbling ants! The next high wind had blown their record away, and the page was clean again for their brethren, the snake, the jerboa and the beetle.

And shells. There were lovely little sea-shells everywhere. Now how did sea-shells get here? Were they blown up by the wind from the Mediterranean seaboard? Or had they lain here for countless ages since the water receded from these sands and an ocean bed became a desert? Were they thousands of years older than the pompous histories of man? This Great War, what was it when set within the infinite stretches of time? Hardly to be observed. And if that were the size of the war, what was the size of his private trouble?

And yet—there was no denying it, even in this hour of detachment—it was his master-thought. Oh, in the name of sense, how could he be so paltry as to worry about the impression his passing had left in the minds of a few unintelligent men? He *didn't* worry. . . . Ah, but he did, though. . . . His intellect might see the absurdity of it, but what would you?—when had intellect a dog's chance of defeating emotion? Not yet in him: he had but to recall that men were speaking unkindly of him, and his body shivered.

He returned to Gilban; and here they whispered to him a terrible rumour about A Company and Hughes Anson—a rumour which shamed him utterly for his pre-occupation with himself. They told him also, with happier voices, that the

battle was over: the cavalry were pursuing the retreating enemy, and thousands of prisoners, including German officers, and a whole German machine-gun section, and some Bedouin irregular horse, would pass through Gilban within the next hour.

They came; train-loads of them in coal wagons. The trains drew up in the Gilban scrub; and from north, south, east and west the soldiers sped down upon them, either to make their acquaintance with Johnny Turk or, if they were Peninsula veterans, to renew it. "Cheerio! there's our old pal Johnny," shouted Joe Wylie. "Johnny, 'oo'd 'a thought o' meeting you 'ere?" And where Joe Wylie was, there was his echo, Art Webster: "Abdul, me lad," shouted Art, "what abaht that there Gally-polly o' yourn—nah then, what abaht it?" And never a shouting crowd like this but Corporal Jim Stott upraised the voice of Lancashire—even as his head towered above the rest of the crowd: "Eh, lad, what aboot it? Dost mind they little cough-drops o' Asiatic Annie, and all? Eh, Mahommed"—it was Jim's humour to be very reproachful to-night—"how couldst tha dare to coom sneakin' round ahr cut? Thou'st copped it this time, any road. Aht tha sorry, choom. Now tha'll have to stop with us while end o' war." Joe Wylie's voice: "Gummy! I seen that there bloke before, knockin' arahnd Achi Baba! Blimey, ain't he grown?" And Jim Stott again: "Ibrahim, lad, was it tha that fired that bloody whizz-bang up at yon Leigh Ravine? Aye, it was tha"—he assumed a tone of grief and disappointment—"Oh thou dirty dog; thou dirty, *dirty* dog!"

And now Joe Wylie had started a song so appropriate that all were joining in: "When Johnny comes marching home. . . ."

The coming of these trains was the feature of the day. No sooner was the rumble of one heard than every man left his tent and rushed to swell the crowd lining the railway. Nearly all the trains carried wounded, the earlier bringing the less serious casualties, the later the stretcher cases. One was wholly converted into a hospital train. And here was the train that held the German machine-gunners. "Come and see the bloody Boches!" went the cry; and the men came and stared—they were excellent at staring—stared at the faired-skinned Teutons seated among the brown Anatolian Turks. "Fine b——s, aren't they?" said they. The Turks begged in dumb show for cigarettes, and most of the tommies were quick to supply them;

others less chivalrous would only barter a cigarette for a badge or coin. The Germans, too proud to ask for favours, sat there silently, but sometimes the tommies offered them their cigarettes—a trifle diffidently, such fine fellows were the Boches—and then the Germans took them and raised their caps in salute. After which, to the general verdict, there was added a rider, "Not bad b——s, these Fritzes." The engine whistled; the train jerked and started amid cries of "Goo'-bye, John*ee*," "Bye-bye, Abdul, mind tha be good," "Write and let us know how you get on," "*Saïda*, Johnny."

The whole scene had been most like a meeting between the representatives of two friendly nations who were playing at war with each other; or, say, of two rival football teams fraternizing at half-time.

Just before dark, when he was returning from another saunter in the desert, Tony was alarmed to see a great activity in the camp: tent-striking, packing, and fatigues carrying baggage. He ran forward and learned that they were to entrain at nine o'clock that night. By nine o'clock they stood ready with everything on their backs, except the blankets and stores, which waited on the side of the railway line.

The train arrived at nine o'clock the next morning. Packed by forties in the trucks, they were rushed to Pelusium, which was the last "station" before the railhead at Romani. And here C Company found its battalion returned from the battle. What news? How had they fared?

Oh, not so bad: nothing to write 'ome about; there'd bin a bit of a scrap in which A Company, as usual, had collared the best of it. The other companies had simply chased the enemy, firing at their backsides and potting 'em off, as they ran.

Then it wasn't true—that rumour they had heard about A Company?

God, no! A Company had simply charged a rear-guard which was firing from the crest of a sand dune. Captain Hughes Anson (added the men, who always loved a picturesque story) had led 'em like a good 'un: he had taken a rifle and a bayonet same as any of the boys and rushed up the sand dune faster than they could follow him, shouting all the Arabic words he could think of: "Allah, Allah, Allah, imshi, igri,

mafish, saïda, bakshish, magnoon, quaes qatir!" And on top of the dune he had yelled out the cries of the Cairo buggy drivers: "Oah Ya Riglak—Oah Ya Minak—Oah Ya Bint"—"Look out, O Thou on the right! Look out, O Thou on the left! Look out, O Woman!" Gaw! he had been a fair treat, and it was only afterwards that he had wondered if Johnny Turk spoke Arabic at all! The Turks on the hill-top had surrendered after a very little bayoneting, chucking up their hands and shouting, "Turk feenish, German bad:" so A Company had patted 'em on the back for speaking so sensible and taken 'em all prisoners.

Many casualties in the battalion?

Wurl, no—not too bad. About thirty killed, including Mr. Oakley and Company Sergeant-Major Boxgrove; and about a hundred wounded. Mostly A Company.

Colonel all right?

Oh, the Colonel—why the old copulator's acting Brigadier now! Yes, the old Brigadier went down with gyppy-tummy, and the Colonel took over; and the first thing he done was to send the 14th, the lads who had failed so badly on the march, into a tough piece of fighting that they might git proud o' themselves again—not a bad idea, neither—and when the Turks bunked from their Katir Oasis, he gave the 14th the honour of entering it first. . . . But look 'ere—this with significant nods —there'd bin something in that yarn about the kevelry being cut up, but seems it was a long time ago; there was no doubt that a whole squadron of the Rutland Yeomanry had been completely surrounded and cut to pieces. *I'mmm!* that was true enough, take their word for it. These 'ere Anatolian Turks weren't the gen'l'men that the Gallipoli Turks had been. Savage brutes, some of 'em.

The next morning the companies from Gilban, because they were rested companies, were told off to march through the noon-day heat to the scene of the fight. They were to take pack mules and sacks for collecting the enemy's discarded rifles, and shovels for burying his dead. They had just formed up and were about to move when all heads were swung around by that stirring noise, a kettledrum thunder on the earth's surface, which means a single galloping horse. They saw a mounted man racing towards them, a cloud of sand his companion; he came like a dust-devil driven by an eddy of wind. The horse's head was tossing magnificently, either in joyous

excitement or in fury with a rider whose rein was hard on his mouth. They soon knew that the latter was the reason; and laughter crackled along the column, to be instantly suppressed. For this irrupting visitor was no other than Padre Quickshaw, a little man on an enormous chestnut gelding, and bumping like a pea on an elephant's back. "Charlie Chaplain's Mounted Infantry," mumbled Art Webster under his breath. Quickshaw slid down the side elevation of his horse, gave it to a man to hold, and ran after the column in the tumbling sand; for the column had started, and moved quite a little way, before the business of arresting his horse and getting himself clear of it had been finally compassed. Breathless and indignant, and with his helmet falling to the nape of his neck, he arrived at the side of Scrase and Tony. But his indignation far exceeded his breathlessness, and, trudging along, he poured out a vituperation of Brigade Headquarters which, in its usual style, had remembered picks and shovels for burying the dead but forgotten the chaplain.

"I'm just about fed up with it," he spat. "I can't make out whether they take us seriously or not, and if they don't, what the blazes are we here for? When I heard what they were doing I told 'em a home truth or two. And your Colonel Tappiter's no better than the old brigadier, who was an ass if ever there was one—he said, 'Well, you know the position, padre: in a fighting unit the M.O.'s a necessary evil but the padre's an unnecessary evil, *hee, hee,*'—the fool!—so I said that that might be his view, and the view of every commanding officer in the army, but it didn't happen to be the War Office's view—the War Office had ordered us to come, and it was theirs not to reason why, theirs not to make reply, theirs but to do and die; and then they tried to sneak out of it by saying that it was Turks you were burying, not Christians; but I told 'em that, even if that was an effective retort (which it wasn't), it was slightly spoiled by being untrue, because I'd heard the Brigade Major tell the Staff Captain that although they tried to get in all the British bodies, there were still a few men missing and he hoped you'd find some trace of them——"

"Who's missing?" asked Tony sharply.

"I don't know. I didn't stop to inquire. I went out and took the Signal Officer's horse, as my own's gone lame——"

"One or two of A Company's missing," supplied Scrase.

"—yes," Quickshaw spurted, "and as they'll be pretty

rotten by this time, we're to bury them where they lie. So there was absolutely no case for not sending a chaplain—absolutely none—as I told 'em. Then I went out and took the Signal Officer's horse—damned ferocious brute with a mouth like iron—and rode out to you ; and the last I saw of Brigade Headquarters was the Staff Captain standing at his tent and screaming at me not to gallop a horse through the sand and the heat, while that fathead of a Brigade Major stood there laughing. I'm *for* it, when I get back. But I couldn't help it ; I tried to bring the brute down to a canter, but he's got nothing in him between a walk and a gallop. Besides, *I* can't ride. I knew nothing about a horse before I joined the army. And in any case, if I've broken his wind—and he sounds like it, I must say—it's their fault—their fault every time."

Marching along—Scrase, Tony and Quickshaw—they found it easy to understand why this northern strip of the Sinai peninsula had been the natural route for the Ancients between the Holy Land and Egypt. The desert was far more undulating here than in the southern regions, and some of the depressions dipped deep enough for moisture, lurking in their bottoms, to provide springs of brackish water and small groves of palm trees, heavy with yellow clusters of dates. They passed three such oases as they forced their feet through the yellow sand.

Behind them dragged the men—grousing. The voice of that best of grousers, Fred Roberts, could be heard burbling on and on, in a very salt stream. "We're scavengers, that's what we are. We're not fighters—don't you believe it, Charlie ; it's only a rumour. We're the sanitary b——s. . . . Royal West Essex, mark yer ! Royal West Crossing Sweepers's more like it ! . . . I say, Charlie, don't you wish you hadn't 'listed in this lousy lot but had joined the army ? You've got some nippers, 'aven't you ? No ? Well, yer lucky. But yer married, aren't yer ? Well, if ever you do have a kid—and anything may happen after yer've bin on leave—not that any of us are likely to get any leave for a couple of years or so—and if yer alive after the war, which I don't think you will be—your nipper'll be arsting you one day, 'Father, what did you do in the Great War ?' 'Cleaned the bloody muck off the desert, my child.' . . ."

Soon a stench of putrefaction, by an instant association of ideas, brought the old Peninsula before their eyes, and Leigh Ravine, and the slopes of Achi Baba ; and they knew that they

were near the battlefield. A toilsome climb up a steep gradient, and they were halted on the battlefield's rim. It seemed a great circular dyke enclosed by lofty white sand-hills. In its central depth an oasis lay in a dark blob, which must have appeared to an aeroplane's view like a bull's-eye in the middle of a white target. On the ridges of the nearer hills were the hastily-dug "five-minute trenches," from which the Essex had rained their fire on the Turks. And all the hollow, and all the farther slopes, were littered with rifles, bayonets, pouches, water-bottles, cooking utensils—and men.

The scavenging companies deployed into extended order so as to cover as much as possible of the far-stretching battlefield. In a trice they were nothing more than dotted lines. The lines swept on, picking up all that was of value among the droppings, and breaking into groups to hollow out graves for the dead. The first of these that Tony saw was a Turk. He was swollen to a great size and burnt in the sun to ebony, the features being nearly all melted away. The huge stiffened body, with its knees drawn up as in suffering and its arms thrown wide as in crucifixion, exuded a moisture that glistened in the sun like varnish. Holding their breath, they dug a hole and with their shovels lifted him into it, not irreverently. And Padre Quickshaw, who had been standing by another little burial group, ran up before they could cover the Turk with sand, and mumbled a Committal over him. He mumbled the Lord's Prayer as well; and the men joined in, slightly lifting their helmets. Following the padre's example, they closed the service with a diffident salute to the fallen foe.

Nearly all the bodies were Turks, but during the day they found one or two British among them.

See, here was a boy of A Company, one of those, we well remember, who shouted on the road to Gilban that they all lived at Number 24, and at Number 24 there was a knocker on the door. . . . Come, padre: another little job for you. His hole is ready.

"And, lumme, here's Corporal Bradley."

"Bradley!"

"Gawd, only yesterday he was sewing his second stripe on his sleeve and swearing that he reckoned nothing to it, but writing home, all the same, to his missus and his old man, to let 'em know about it. Blimey, but he's stiff, ain't he?"

"Well, make his hole wider, and let him lie comfortable. Where's the padre?"

"Who's this feller? Unrecognizable, ain't he? Better just shovel him in——"

"No, you fool, get his identity disc first."

"Gaw!"

"What are you staring at? What does it say?"

"Private E. Botten, R.C. It's Ernie Botten! And he thought he done hisself well when he became a Brigade runner! Didn't reckon he'd run into this! Poor old Ernie. . . ."

(Once more Tony stood with Honor and Jill and Peggy upon the crown of Wolstonbury, on England's last day of peace, and looked down upon the far spread carpet of the Sussex Weald, with its villages nestling against their trees—little Twineham there, and Albourne her sister, and Cowfold over the pastures. . . . Once more he crouched in the ultimate darkness of a mine-sap, a fathom down beneath the feet of the Turks on Gallipoli, and met the voice of Ernie Botten for the first time, not seeing his face or his form, and spoke with him of Twineham, where they would live again one day and remember old times of war. And here lay Ernie Botten. . . . He had worried in his petty way lest Botten should take home to Twineham an unkind story of Lieut. O'Grogan; and here the lad lay. What to think of it all? . . . One didn't think. One just looked down on Ernie Botten lying there.)

"He was an R.C., sir, and I guess he'd have liked his own priest, but Mr. Quickshaw'll do what he can for him. . . ."

"He's all ready for you, Padre."

"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. May he rest in peace."

"Light perpetual! Gaw, 'e'll get that all right, in this bloody desert."

Up yon ridge, and where are we now? Why, the buryings are all done here, and what a crowd of graves! Some blokes 'a' been here before us, and in a deuce of a hurry, it seems; burying 'em as shaller as this! Bobbin' up again, most of 'em. Look, mate—here's a hand comin' up—jest like old Percy on Gallipoli. Now how's that? And all English boys here; them's English helmets and caps lying about—and English newspapers and novels and playing cards. And here's Player's and Gold Flake cigarette tins—and writing-blocks. Funny! who takes newspapers and novels and notepaper

with 'em into a scrap? They brown quickly in the sun, these 'ere newspapers. "*Rutland Chronicle*, April 20th, 1916." Blimey, I got it! this is the spot where the Rutland Yeomanry were done in! O' course! . . . Jest fancy that! There must 'a' bin some ugly work here one fine morning, and a lot of funny thoughts before the Turks' bayonets went 'ome. Here's a letter with a Rutland address on it, ain't it?—one can't make it out very well, it's fadin' so—yes, "Rutland," and oh Lord, look at all the crosses for kisses at the bottom. . . . Ah well. . . .

There it goes in the wind, blowin' a long way from the lad that dropped it.

A power o' Turks buried here too. Seems the Rutlands put up a bit of a fight before they went under. But I say! It does one good, don't it, to think that our fellers came up and put it across the old Turk, jest where they cut up the Rutlands? Bit o' vengeance, like. This is an old Turk's letter, and I expect it's full o' kisses and slop too. . . . Funny! Seems a bit of a shyme in a way—don't it. . . . Oh I dunno! Sometimes I wonder what's the perishin' sense of it all.

By every account the Victory of Romani was a famous victory. The 12th Lancashires arrived to strengthen the Essex at Pelusium, and told them how, with bands playing, and amid the gabbling and gesticulating interest of the *fellaheen*, they had escorted three thousand prisoners through the Cairo streets, to a compound at Mahdi Camp. And the Special Order of the Day announced that the Commander-in-Chief had received telegrams of congratulation from the King, the Sultan, the High Commissioner, the Sirdar, and the Minister of Public Works. Colonel Tappiter, now that the old Brigadier had returned, came back to his battalion, and paraded them, and shouted over their ranks the words of the telegrams. "The utmost praise," said the telegrams, "must be given to troops who could win so signal a victory under such adverse conditions of sand and heat." And those few of them, added the C.O., who had not come within firing distance of the enemy, had played their part in the victory, none the less, by their share of the heavy marching and the other hardships. Battles were won, said he, not by rifle-fire but by the movements of troops,

and the winning factor was the obedience and the endurance of the men.

"Bah! Back-scratching," grumbled Fred Roberts, whose attitude now was that he had spoiled for the scrap and been denied it. "Soft soap. . . ." "Aye, and there goes me D.C.M.," said Corporal Stott, who had enjoyed a firm conviction that he was destined to win that distinction in the Battle of Romani. "It looks as though you'll get your bones back to Blighty," said C Company's mess to Childe Harold, who had been vouchsafed a remarkable presentiment, and had published it for the interest of all students of psychic phenomena, that he would leave his bones to bleach in the desert.

They were right who held that the old moon of Ramadan would die before the armies clashed. Its successor had watched the fight, and now looked down upon the finish of it all. A night of mid-August, and Tony stood at his tent door, waiting to enjoy the fine sight of that moon, nowadays at the full, rising above the skyline. He had watched it, some evenings before, when, in the presence of the daylight, it had come up huge in circle, but shy and pale as a white cloud. To-night, with no daylight to blanch it, it would play a different game. From the camp at Pelusium the desert stretched away to the east till it rose in the ridge that had been the western limit of the battle. Suddenly over that ridge, with no premonitory lighting of the world, peeped a red-gold rim of surprising width. It was the forehead of the moon. As it grew into a semicircle it burned a luminous orange, but kept all its light to itself, leaving the sky a night-blue expanse and the desert a dark featureless waste. And, rising rapidly, it showed a disc as great as that of the setting sun: indeed, it differed from the sun only in its failure, while floating so low in the sky, to flush either heaven or earth with light. Strange that so huge a lamp could hang there and illuminate only itself!

"'Tain't a moon at all," said Joe to the men, who were emerging in crowds from their tents to see the moon up. "It's a bloody Dutch cheese."

It soared up, changing its orange to a lighter yellow, and finding a power to flood with its own hue the neighbouring sky. And the smaller it became the more it lit welkin and wilderness, till at last its white rays came searching all things, and the sky was the colour of a slate behind an incandescent light, and the desert was the colour of cream. Its brilliance

turned the stars to tinsel, and over the desert dropped an inky shadow at every rib and ripple and foot-print, so that the sands stretched away from Pelusium all speckled and straked like the back of an animal.

It looked down upon the desert it had lit, and saw what? It saw on the wide battle-ground the corpse of many a poor Turk who had died in some corner unreached by the burial parties; and behind, along the tracks of the Turkish advance, the carcasses of horses and oxen—and the bare-necked vultures flying towards them. And many a camel, too, which had dropped and died, turning its head towards its tail. Yet farther back it saw the disputed oasis of Katir occupied now by khaki figures—a place of dark palm groves and quiet wells that were full enough to reflect its light. More eastward still, in a desert growing brushwood like tufts of hirsute, it saw the Anzac Light Horse moving among the groves and wells of Bir-el-Abd; and far behind all these things the Turks themselves, wearily retreating upon their base at El Arish, seven thousand fewer than when they came marching westward.

CHAPTER VI

THE DESERT COLUMN

SO went Johnny Turk. Men told of Johnny that he had said but yesterday, with one eye on the narrow channel of the Dardanelles and the other on the curve of the river at Kut, that while he was ready to conclude peace with Russia, he saw no reason for doing so with England, whom he had so often beaten. Follow him home then. He had crossed the desert and threatened Egypt; now let *us* essay a crossing and threaten the Holy Land. He had failed, probably because his means of transport over a hundred miles of heavy sand were as primitive as the Syrian's before him; we would do better—we would take a railroad behind us. On our transport lines there should be not only horses and camels and mules, but steam. At present the railroad stopped at Romani, which was some ninety miles from the borders of the Holy Land; we would drive it forward through the sand dunes and over the sand valleys, at the rate of an English mile a day. Three months, and we would answer his "Check!" to Kantara with a "Check!" to El Arish. And by the side of the railway would go a pipe-line with pumping stations at every few miles, sucking up the water from the Sweet Water Canal, which is the water of the Nile. In front of the advancing railway the vanguard of the troops would spread out in the desert, with a screen of cavalry between them and the scouting enemy; and the remainder of the troops would lie at intervals along the line guarding its flanks. Such would be the Desert Column, now to be organized, and so to be called. It would take Railhead like a monarch over the desert, with more than a Sovereign's escort in front and an army of guards behind.

And there was more in the case for the Broad Gauge Railway. Consider. Already at Kantara its poor little twenty miles were linked up with the railway from Cairo; only push it

forward to El Arish and thence to Jerusalem, and you would have a railway from Egypt's capital to Palestine's. And such a railway, built under war conditions with cheap military labour, would be a profitable investment indeed. The British in 1916, with the world falling about their ears, did not cease to be good tradesmen. After all, the war would end one day.

This, then, was to be the way that the British crossed the Wilderness of Sinai into Canaan, three thousand years after Israel: locomotives bringing them, besides the ammunition for their battles, good bacon and marmalade for their breakfasts, and fags—Player's, Gold Flake and Woodbines—for the hours between meals. An unhurrying way, and somewhat stolid, if you like; but wise. They fight better on these things. There will be hardships enough before El Arish is theirs: so give them their beef and their bacon.

So in the quiet of the sands after the battle of Romani the railway forged ahead—one mile a day. Enormous gangs of Gyppy labourers altered the contour of a strip of desert near the Mediterranean seaboard, working under the tutelage of the Royal Engineers—who, by the way, spoke Arabic now, though not as Cairo spoke it, but after the school of Stratford-atte-Bow. The first and largest gang made cuttings through the lofty dunes or raised viaducts across the deep hollows, their methods the simplest: they just shovelled the sand into baskets and carried it on their backs out of the cutting or on to the rising viaduct; it was the method, ten times magnified, of the children wielding bucket and spade on an English shore. Next went a gang laying the sleepers on the new-made track, and laying them very close together, for the sands were a treacherous base. And lastly went a gang clamping down the rails. The wild imagery of the Hebrew prophet had become a fact: a highway was made straight in the desert, and every valley exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low.

The thousands of tourists and tradesmen who to-day are rumbled and bumped over that stretch of railway from Kantara to El Arish (it is a little bumpy, because a mile a day was hasty going), what think they of the thousands of Londoners, Lancastrians, Scots, West Indians, and Anzacs who guarded it yard by yard in a year that is dead, the sun burning and blinding them, the enemy bombing them, the *khamsin* and the sand storms maddening them; of whose bodies not a few lie under

the sand in a parallel line with the railway and the water-pipe, their work enduring while they themselves are laid away? The travellers reck little of these men; they sleep, carried along at many miles an hour, not at a mile a day; and the desert palls. Gilban . . . Pelusium . . . fancy calling these "stations" when they're nothing but wastes of scrub! . . . Romani . . . Bir-el-Abd. Dear heart, it's a dull journey.

And if they think little of an army that was once here and has now been gone these many years, what know they of this or that individual man, and his petty emotions? No; of no moment at all that at Pelusium one evening in 1916 Lieut. O'Grogan approached a bell-tent which was the home shared by Aylwin and Harold Wimborne, and heard the voice of Lieut. Moulden and his own name; and that, since the voice of Moulden could drive all nobility from his mind and hand it over to its fermenting obsession, he stayed where he was, with strained ears, eavesdropping.

"You know what's said about O'Grogan," mumbled the voice of Moulden. "I'm never quite sure that it's fair myself, but that's neither here nor there—really: the point is, whether or not the Colonel thought it of him."

"Do *you* think it of him?" This was the voice of Childe Harold; and one heard in it the deep interest of a boy in a puff of scandal.

"Well . . . I dunno; but I mean to say: even if it was true of him at one time, he's been a damn good officer ever since he came back. Of course he's not been up against anything to test him. . . . So perhaps the Colonel was taking no risks."

"One would have thought"—these were the sententious accents of Aylwin—"that old Tappiter would have left out D Company rather than C. One imagines the Colonels get properly flustered when sudden orders come through for only three companies to go into battle, and that their minds register nothing but the order of the alphabet, and so they invariably send A, B and C into battle and tell D to stop where they are: isn't that so?"

"That's right," said Moulden. "And that's my point—really. I mean to say, I can't help thinking that there was something very pointed about the Colonel's choosing A, B and D and leaving out C Company. I put it this way, that the C.O. had his doubts about Scrase and O'Grogan. Scrase

was alright until after that stunt on December the 19th, when something seemed to go wrong with him; he doesn't show it outwardly, of course, but, I mean, the old man's observant. And if you add to that, young O'Grogan's unfortunate reputation and the comparative newness of you two fellows and the fact that he's always detested me—well, you get an idea why C Company stayed at Gilban."

"Have another little spot?"

"No, thanks. I'm feeling a little fuzzy already and I must be going. I don't know why it is: I can take my whisky with the best at home, but in this confounded heat . . . Well, cheerio!"

"No, don't go yet, Moulden," begged Childe Harold. "What *did* happen to Scrase on December the 19th?"

"Ask me another. He fought magnificently, but he's never been quite the same since. You can see he's driving himself all the time. I mean, the night Colonel Tappiter came in and told us we were going straight into the fighting, I looked at Scrase and he turned as white as death."

"And how did Bungay take the news?"

"He said, 'Oh glory!' and looked as pleased as if he had been left a fortune. But I dunno: you can never tell how far he's acting a part. He's got so dreadfully sensitive about the hard things that have been said of him that he thinks he must always be playing the fire-eater——"

"*You bloody liar!*"

Tony, his face burning, his fists trembling and his voice breaking, was standing in the tent and staring at Moulden. Moulden was seated on a ration-box beside the camp table, and he paled. Aylwin and Harold were also seated on boxes; they gaped. A silence surrounded Tony's entry. He addressed his words to Moulden, and there was menace in his tone.

"I was passing and I heard what you said. And look here! you can just——"

Moulden recovered quickly from his horrid moment of overthrow.

"I was only taking your part——" he began.

"Which is another bloody lie! You know perfectly well that there's absolutely no justification for that story about me, and you hinted that there might once have been something in it. I heard you. You do all that you can—always—to keep it alive."

"Have a spot of drink, O'Grogan?" Harold invited cheerfully: he could think of no other way to meet the situation.

"Not I!" answered Tony. "It was a damned judgment on him that I should be passing at that minute. He knows perfectly well that I was ordered off the Peninsula, and that I didn't go of my own choice."

"But I've always said so," protested Moulden.

"No, you haven't . . . at least you have . . . Oh, you know well enough what you've done, and how you've done it. I've called you a cad before, and you took it lying down. I repeat it now. Are you going to lie down under it again?"

"Oh, shut up, O'Grogan!" said Aylwin, never afraid to lecture his seniors. "You can't rush into our tent and start fighting."

"Well, let him come outside then."

"Rot. Moulden didn't say anything much against you. He was rather standing up for you, I thought."

"Yes, yes, of course he was. . . . Have a spot of whisky," encouraged Harold.

"Oh, you don't understand. . . . He . . . he . . ."

"Oh, dry up, O'Grogan." Aylwin repeated his order. "We're just as much to blame as he is. We all talk scandal in this blasted desert. There's nothing else to do."

"No, no, you don't understand. He's just using you as his tools. He's just making you his messengers to spread a libellous little hint, and, by God! you can spread along with it that I knocked him silly for his pains——"

Before they could cope with him, Tony had struck out at Moulden, his fist missing the eye at which it was aimed and scraping in an ugly tangent past the left temple; Moulden had closed with Tony; and both had fallen against the canvas wall of the tent, whose centre-pole creaked under the strain. The table overturned, and the bottle of whisky began to empty its wealth into the sand.

"Here, stop that," shouted Aylwin, while Harold rushed to the whisky bottle. "The damned tent'll be down. Get out, O'Grogan. Don't come in here and make a beast of yourself."

Harold, having rescued as much as possible of the whisky, was at liberty to rescue as much as possible of the less important Moulden, and he helped Aylwin to pull the wrestlers apart; who then stood opposite each other, white-hot temper blazing in their eyes and vibrating in their limbs.

"O'Grogan, I think you'd better go," suggested Aylwin—he being an authority on deportment as on everything else. "Moulden, after all, is our guest in this tent: you're not, just now."

Tony did not move.

"I say, Good-bye, old thing," Harold hinted, not unkindly.

Tony turned.

"I suppose you're right. . . . And I'm sorry if I've been a pig, but you don't understand. You . . . he . . . Oh well, I'm going. Good-bye."

"Have a spot of whisky before you go?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, so long, Bungay."

Tony was out in the fallen dusk, walking away at an abnormal speed, the passion within him an engine to drive him on. What good had he done? None at all; only harm. In a day or two it would be told all over the brigade how O'Grogan had fought Moulden, and what about—Harold, that child with the body of a blacksmith and the head of a jay, would be much too delighted with the yarn not to chatter about it everywhere.

The misery of it, the frustration, and the bewilderment! The ropes that bound him—constricting and inflaming—were woven of nothing—or of little more than nothing: of careless talk, and one man's airy half-lie, and other men's unimaginative but unmalicious chatter; they were gossamer, but, they had him tight, and he couldn't break away. And the irony of it. English virtues and English disabilities had blent to make these bonds; in their substance was England's sportsmanship, her love of the sticker, her shy hiding patriotism and her easy good nature, together with England's dullness and obstinacy and flight from thought. The thing that he loved, and wanted to fight for, had chosen him for a victim! Did he hate it, then? No, he didn't. It had captured his imagination, and he loved it; even in his anger he could see that its achievements were more than its failures; he could say that his faith was unshaken; but oh! to be able to break from its toils, and to fight in happiness again at its side.

Next morning Scrase and Tony rode northward from Pelusium Camp towards the Mediterranean shore. Their horses

climbed the last hill, and when their eyes came above the skyline they saw a waste of sand level as an inland lake and stretching to the mirage that veiled the Great Sea. One long mound trembled in the mirage; otherwise the plain was unbroken, and its crystallized salt sparkled in the sun like mica or diamonds. That mound was their goal: wise men had told them that it was as interesting a spot as any in Northern Sinai.

As their horses' hoofs broke the crisp but brittle plain, or, sinking into it, stumbled a little, Tony, very thoughtful, was closing a protracted inner debate: he was resolving that he would tell Kit of all that Moulden had said about both of them. Should honour and kindness keep his lips shut? Hang it, he didn't know. Why should he keep silence: one could argue that the captain of C Company must be informed when it was being traduced. Specious? Well, p'raps so, but he didn't care. Somehow Moulden's touch upon him was always leprous, slaying the health and waking the evil. Perhaps his motives were really selfish: a desire to injure his punisher and a longing for a companion in the unjust punishment. But what of it? He spoke; and Scrase rode grimly beside him, hearing the full story.

"Oh, he says that of me, does he?" Scrase commented, after a silence.

"Yes. I thought you'd better know, old man."

Silence again.

"Have *you* noticed anything wrong in me?" Scrase demanded at last.

"I thought you looked a bit groggy when you came off the Peninsula, that's all."

"Well, the trouble is that Friend Moulden's probably right. I think it's quite likely that old Tappiter left C Company behind for my sake—even though he knows C Company to be the best in the battalion, after Hughes Anson's."

When Kit had said this, his jaw went sideways, as a man's will who has determined to face an ordeal. Tony could answer nothing; and for a while there was only the sound of the crusted plain cracking under the hoofs.

"I wonder if I can make you understand what happened on December the 19th," Scrase went on. "Up till then I had believed that, though I hated the war, I could go through with it. But in that attack—oh, Bungay, it was—it was—but you'll see. I arrived first in the Turks' trench—only

because I was desperately driving myself on, as some people do who doubt themselves—and I shot a wretched Turk who made a half-hearted attempt to bayonet me; and the rest of the Turks—there were about five in the bay—just stood there like frightened cows, staring at me. I don't know what kind of Turks they were—some poor half-starved Anatolian peasants, I suppose. I hesitated a second, not liking to shoot them down in cold blood, and then one of them seemed to wake up and come at me, and I shot him through the eye, and then suddenly I began to distrust my own hesitation, so I immediately emptied the other chambers of my revolver into the faces of the rest—one after another, and only to justify myself—and, Tono, they were simply cowed—our bombardment seemed to have stunned them—and one of them couldn't have been more than sixteen—and when my bullet smashed his face, I turned violently sick for a moment; I thought I was going to faint—have you ever nearly fainted? It's a ghastly sensation—but I pulled myself together, and in a kind of mad despair of everything, I began to fight and kill, with something of the joy of a homicidal maniac. I kind of felt, 'Oh to hell with everything and everybody in the world. If they want us to kill, let's do it! Let's kill the bloody world!' I tell you, I could have shot children at that moment. And the reaction the next day, it was like nothing I have experienced before—I suppose there's always this terrible reaction after any paroxysm. But from first to last, that attack and the reaction after it were such a sick and awful business that I began to dread the next time. . . . And that got mixed up with a dread lest I should fail; and these two dreads became a morbid obsession, a nightmare which haunts me when I'm awake as well as when I'm asleep, and even when I can't quite remember what the original fear was. . . . Do you know, Tono, I'm nearly sick every time I have to teach the men their bayonet practice, or when, on a rifle inspection, I look down the barrels of their rifles. . . . What'll happen when we really have to attack again, I don't know."

What could Tony say to all this? His words were poor enough.

"Couldn't you get sent home?" he asked.

"I don't see that I can. That would only be to run from a mental fear as others run from a physical fear. . . . No, one must stick it out. . . . And, Bungay, not the least horrid part

of my present condition is the bewilderment. I seem to have lost faith in everything—can you understand?—in all abstract ideas—all values. I doubt love and morality and beauty and truth and all of 'em. . . . I can see nothing standing upright anywhere."

There was a quickness in Tony's mind which enabled him to answer at once: "Well, you've just given the lie to that, old man. When you said that one must stick it out, you showed that you still believed in fidelity, at any rate."

Scrase seemed to meditate long; then he said:

"Yes, you've hit it. I still believe that men must stand by one another, even if the universe is nothing but a mixture of savagery and illusion. I suppose that's why I'm still here. I suppose that's why I haven't shot myself long ago."

"Oh, shut up, Kit!" Tony protested.

"Sometimes I try to cling to old Tappiter's idea—that directly one's become a soldier, one's guaranteed to sacrifice all thoughts of one's own and to become a machine for doing the set job as efficiently as possible. . . . He's rather a simple old thing, no doubt; but simplicity is wisdom sometimes. . . . However, I mustn't worry you with my troubles."

And those words rebuked Tony.

They were now nearing the mound, and they observed that the face of the waste was peppered with red brick-chips and powdered with red brick-dust. What was this man-made substance doing here, broken into its myriad fragments and broadcast over the plain? And here they were passing a well, walled round with bricks which were surely Roman. And so well mortared were they that one surmised they would hurt the point of an army pick to-day. The closer they came to the mound the thicker lay the brick chips; was the mound their source? Yes, the long, low, oval hill was red with them, the chips covering it like a brash. Riding round the hill, they found on its northern side a width of wall yet standing, whose bricks were like those seen in Chichester or St. Albans. They put their horses to the gentle slope and found here and there a recumbent pillar broken where it fell. At one place many massive columns lay parallel, the tops of their bases still showing at their feet, and the ponderous pediment which they once supported lying half-buried along their heads. The wreck of a temple entrance it seemed. Such tumbled majesty to find in the midst of a desert.

It was all that was left of the ancient imperial city of Pelusium, once the eastern key of Egypt. Here a Pharaoh Psammetichus met the Persians under Cambyses and was defeated. Here the armies of another king of Egypt faced those of his sister Cleopatra, while Pompey the fugitive was seeking to land here from the sea. In those days an arm of the Nile flowed this way and watered a flourishing town; but desiccation had won; and in the fullness of time the desert devoured Pelusium. And to-day as Scrase and Tony rode about the mound which was Pelusium's grave, with the desert stretching all round them, they came suddenly upon the bivouac of a Bedouin. It was made of desert rushes, and not six feet long nor five feet high. A pleasant sight, but why? Why pleasant to see the proud erections of the brick-builders and the masons overthrown, and the simplest dwelling which the hand of man could fashion pitched among their ruins in unoffending triumph? Perhaps because the inner heart of man rejoices in every testimony that pomps shall wither but simplicity endure.

The poet in Tony could not but see in the prospect around him a picture of the transience and futility of all things. And Kit had seen it too.

"Well . . . why worry?" was his comment.

"Yes, why?" laughed Tony.

And they turned their horses for home, each riding in his own silence. Transience! Of what import now were the thoughts and fears of the soldiers of Psammetichus?

And yet Tony's thoughts went worrying on; he thought how he had not yet been compelled to kill men at close quarters like Scrase; but if he was to do the heroic deed that would re-establish his name, it would have to be in just such a murderous way. Was he as anxious to do it after hearing Scrase's story, which he could perfectly understand—yes, *perfectly?* Honestly, was he? *Yes.* He *must* do it; he simply *must.* Ha, it was plain enough that pity could not hold him back when love of his own good name drove him on. Where was he getting to, that he should count the lives of Turks or Germans as less important than the thoughts which a few simple-minded men might hold about his pluck? . . . But it was the truth; he saw it; and he had no strength to change it. He had only to think of Moulden talking to Aylwin and Wimborne, and hell! yes, he must go on. Funny! And this from one who had believed that he could love the whole world. But there

was the fact, not to be denied. Rather did his teeth set in a resolution to slay the lie, no matter how many widows and children might weep in Stamboul or Berlin.

They arrived home to learn that the battalion would move forward to-morrow with the advancing railway; they would pass the outposts of the 52nd Division now guarding Railhead, and themselves take over the desert watch, while Railhead came up behind them.

At dawn a train rolled in to carry them as far as the track would allow. Its engine snorted into the "station," and all cheered when they saw that it had been shipped from England and bore on its side the letters, L.S.W.R. The London and South Western Railway in the Wilderness of the Chosen People!

"Come along! 'Oos fer Portsmouth, boys?" shouted Art Webster. "Cheap excursion to Portsmouth! Got yer return ticket?"

"Nah! won't want return tickets," Joe Wylie answered. "They're burying us at Bir-el-Abd. Pop in."

The train stopped where the good rails stopped, and the men fell in for a long march through the sand. They passed the Gyppies clamping down the rails; they passed the gangs manhandling the sleepers and tossing them down on the newly-levelled way; they passed the vast multitude shovelling the sand out of a cutting and carrying it in baskets up the embankment, to the tune of, "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" Hundreds of marching tommies mimicked them: "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" Then an hour's plodding, and they passed the 52nd outpost, and knew that they were in the open desert, with nothing but the cavalry screen between them and the enemy.

Five thousand feet above them, to their great comfort, an aeroplane wheeled and banked and roared away into the menacing distances ahead, and roared back to them, and banked and wheeled again—God bless him! He was ready to fight old Fritz, the dare-devil Austrian, who made a hobby of coming out at a height of twelve thousand feet, and a speed of apparently twelve thousand miles an hour, and bombing the serpent of men which he could see crawling in front of the crawling railway.

Tony was wishing that he would come. It seemed a terrible thing to wish, but he couldn't deny the truth of his thought. He wanted the thrill, the excitement; and his eyes pierced the gloom ahead for the tiny speck, and his ears strained for the murmur of Fritz.

Fritz came. There was the unmistakable throb of an engine flying much higher than their escort; it grew louder, though never very loud; it sounded directly overhead; and a thousand up-turning faces—up-turning against a shouted order—saw him there, recognizing at once his wide wings and his fish tail. The British aeroplane was spiralling up to meet him —"Thet's the spirit!"—more British aeroplanes were roaring up from behind, with their line of flight tilted towards the Austrian—"That's the stuff to give him! Let 'im 'ave it, mate!"—the anti-aircraft guns had opened, and white puffs of shrapnel hung themselves under his fuselage (but far too low) and in partnerships of two danced a pavane in the wind; the machine-guns chattered up there; and here came old "Also Ran," a very slow and immensely popular British machine which could never keep pace with its younger and faster sisters, but always chunked along, none the less, and turned about and went home again when it found that it was too late for the fight.

The Colonel shouted to the battalion to break its column; its units dispersed over the sands and lay on their bellies— "You get the idea, don't you, chum," explained Fred Roberts. "It's 'eavy odds agin old Fritz 'ittin' us if we're in a narrer column, so we spreads out and gives him a reasonable targit. It's only sportin'." There was an abrupt silence, a fearful quiet, for through the air whined that breath-arresting sound which in the same second was sigh, moan and roar; and the bomb exploded on a dune, hurling up sand and smoke, so that once in its life the dune could feel itself a volcano.

"What a rotten shot! What a rotten shot! What a rotten shooter too!" sings Art Webster.

The bomb had fallen far enough away for none of its splinters to reach the men, and near enough for them to ignore the succeeding bombs which must inevitably drop still further away. Three more dropped, and then Fritz swung round and raced for home, and the British machines, still striving to get to his level, spat bullets at his tail.

"Gah! they'll never catch 'im!" grumbled Fred Roberts.

"That's the worst of them cheap machines. Why the devil can't we buy a decent one? 'Britannia rules the air.' Does she? Thump! . . . There goes old Also Ran. *'E's* given up. 'E's for 'ome. Good-bye. . . . Good-bye-ee."

The R.W.E.s were now in full column-of-route again, and ploughing forward while they cast up their eyes to watch the British machines returning to their base.

"See the cars comin' 'ome from the Durby?" cried Joe Wylie. "It's all over bar shoutin'. Yeh, and I put me tanner on Fritz any day, I would."

Then nothing but the *chuff—chuff—chuff—chuff* of marching feet.

Bir-el-Abd. When Tony next wrote to Honor, he made mention of one comfort which accrued to desert fighting: that as you moved from place to place you were not inspired to write home your descriptions of the changing landscape; because it never changed; it was always the same, whatever your movements; and your first pen-picture would do duty for all. Bir-el-Abd was what? Sand and scrub, and round it all the rim of a cloudless Egyptian sky. It varied only from the Pelusium scene in the gentler swell of its dunes.

Their first night at Bir-el-Abd was a jumpy night. Vanguards are always uneasy. It was lonely squatting here so far in front of the reserves, with the enemy well advised of their position and conspiring in Lord knew what stratagems. There were Bedouins in the darkness too—a poor grade of Bedouins, from all they had seen of them, but stealthy creatures and mischievous. Tush, tush: one had to get used to this feeling of loneliness. Colonel Tappiter sent them to their posts with a dark jest: "Stand to, and if the Turks come, God help you." They went; armed with flares to fire—white, should they sight the Turk; red, did he attack. . . . Beneath the desert stars the darkness was not profound, but diluted with light, and eerie; and their eyes watered as they strained at the patches of scrub—for scrub could look so like to stalking men.

But this apprehensiveness was of the first night only. Two or three days of a Bir-el-Abd as quiet as Pelusium or Gilban, with the ration camels coming and going, and the mess stores

dragging into camp on wooden sleighs, and a stray Anzac horseman wandering in from in front with the report of an empty desert—and all were easy again. They raised the football posts on a salted flat, and company played company when the sun had dropped; and platoon played platoon. Once they rounded up a herd of Bedouins and imprisoned them in a barbed wire compound—why, they didn't know; they had been ordered to do it. And then in shorts, shirts and helmets they stood around the barbed wire and gaped at their catch.

They were worth gaping at, these dirty old Abrahams and ragged old Sarahs, these pretty young Rachels (far less ragged) and that veiled old hag who was reputed to be a hundred and two—but all wise gapers stood to windward. Not even the lovely Rachels were best approached on their lee; and if you added to the contribution of the humans the aggregate smell of their mange-ridden camels, their ponies, goats and poultry —my fathers! were the companies of the patriarchs as strong as this when they came with their thousands of asses and camels and goats and men-servants and maid-servants? That Old Moore there, he was said to be especially strong. Captain Hughes Anson even reported his strength to Colonel Tappiter, who stood by and put up a pair of spectacles and demanded, "Which?" for he was anxious to see this record-holding old gentleman. And when he saw him, a skinny old carcass hung with multi-coloured rags and matted hair, he removed his spectacles and said only, "Not a very dressy fellow, what?" and walked away. Meanwhile the tommies were looking at the brown and bright-eyed maidens, and declaring, "She gave me the glad eye, she did—the saucy bint." And now that the Colonel was gone they pointed out to one another his girl. This was a girl who had wept so bitterly when she was rounded up with her family that Colonel Tappiter, in kindly mood, and forgetful of her ignorance of English, and of teasing to come, had stroked her gently on the shoulders and soothed her, saying, "Never mind, dearie, don't cry—don't cry; everything will be all right." But she was weeping still.

Presently there was a broil. Fred Roberts was in altercation with an ancient Bedouin. The ancient Bedouin, in driving a baby camel to its corner, had prodded its rump with a piece of wood sharply spiked with a nail; and Fred Roberts wasn't falling for cruelty like that. "'Ere! Stop that!" he shouted.

"Stop that, I tell yer! Crool old b——! Look at 'im: he's shovin' a nyle into that there camel's arse." A chorus of execration supported him, so he continued: "'Ere stop it! Leave 'im be! You do that again and you'll 'ave the point of my bayonet in your own backside for a change. Yuss! See how you like that. . . . Dirty old excrement!" The Bedouin, perceiving at last that he was doing something that was unpopular with the audience, stood and stared at them; and the English soldiers, with anger flooding their cheeks, stared back and shouted their abuse. Fred Roberts made as if he would scale the barbed wire and knock the old gentleman down. And so in a profound misunderstanding they faced each other: the old brown man of the East, and a simple railwayman from Southend, each obtusely unaware that his own attitude to the lower animals was not valid the whole world over.

At Bir-el-Abd they had no tents, except the Colonel's forty-pounder. From the day they left Pelusium the furnishings of the men had been reduced to what they could carry in their packs, and the kit of the officers to thirty pounds a man; and the transport, needed for rations and water, carried no camp equipment except shovels, rolls of blankets, and bundles of palm sticks. With the palm sticks and the blankets the men made bivouacs for shelter from the blazing sun by day; and at night took down the blanket walls, and, wrapping themselves up in them, slept beneath the open sky. Or the lucky ones, who were near an oasis, built their "bivvies" out of interlaced palm branches; and the sunlight, piercing through, dappled their sleeping blankets with gold; the moonlight dappled them with silver. Had you slept near Weymann's Dump, you awoke to the jingling of bells, the crying of Arab voices, and the grunting of the camels whose bells they were: it was the water coming up; for Railhead was still some distance behind Bir-el-Abd and the pipe-line much farther yet. Long strings of camels, with a white-gowned Gyppy to lead each three, were approaching Weymann's Dump, and the twelve-and-a-half-gallon tanks swung on their sides. From breakfast at ten o'clock was an anxious time: it was Fritz's visiting hour. Thrice a week, or more frequently, his palpitating drone troubled the eastern sky—how well they learned to distinguish his peculiar cyphering note!—and he hovered overhead in the early blue, and dropped a dozen of his visiting cards, and sped

away as if his heart were in his mouth, evanescing in the bright, white eastern fade.

For all to lie on their faces and await the issue of the bombs was held to be precaution enough in the first days; till the morning when a bomb found the heart of C Company's bivouacs, and five lads did not rise to their feet, as the others did, when the danger was gone by. All ran towards them and saw the sand crimsoned at their side and the brains of one lying in a pulp against his hair. None of them responded to touch or voice: the five were dead. And Tony was appalled with himself; for, if he were to be honest, he must admit that he had not been without his thrill at the sight of that sudden death. They carried the dead out of the camp, and at sundown buried them. And in Battalion Orders that night, it was written that funk-holes must be dug beside every bivouac; to each man his own hole. The men declared that they were longing for Fritz to come again that they might jump into these six-foot graves.

Two mornings later he came: the familiar throb trembled again in the upper skies, and a thousand hearts had scarcely begun their own answering throb, when a bomb detonated less than five hundred yards away, and another was whining down. . . . Two hundred yards. . . . In the next few seconds Tony, crouching in his grave—though never so palpitant with life—peeped over its rim and saw Colonel Tappiter standing before his tent and shouting at the men, "Get into your holes—be damned to you! Get into your holes—be damned to you!" and making no attempt to step into his own; he saw the men disappear into the ground like a field of scuttling rabbits; he saw the Gyppies who had been holding the camels by Weymann's Dump abandon their ropes and rush wildly about—some into the desert, some under the bellies of their animals—while they shrilled out, as if the bomber could hear them, "Me no Engleesh! Me no Engleesh! May their religion perish!" he heard the whine and roar of the third bomb and—after a breathless duck—saw a black and yellow cloud smoking up from the sand near the straying camels; he saw one camel turn its slow, stupid head towards its flank, as if to learn what had struck it there, and then collapse on to its knees and on to its belly and turn its slow, patient head towards its tail, to die; he saw the next camel leap to escape, but, finding itself moored to its fallen companion, turn its slow,

philosophical head as if in survey of the situation and then remain patiently standing where it was; and lastly he saw Colonel Tappiter doubling into his own hole, many seconds too late.

The raid was over, and none but the poor camel had died: hundreds of men lifted a grin above their graves, and themselves after the grin. It was now that Tony recalled having seen Scrase acting after the pattern of the Colonel and neglecting to visit his own hole till he had shouted his men into theirs. And it had been an easy, and not a forced, action. It was not physical danger of which Kit was afraid.

Bir-el-Abd. Those liquid syllables were to fill for ever with remembered pain. The 15th had lingered many weeks at Bir-el-Abd; Railhead had overtaken them and was pushing on through the desert many miles in front; one battalion of the 52nd (Lowland) Division, and another and another, had long ago marched past their camps of bivouacs and gone ahead to become the vanguard; an Expeditionary Force Canteen had arrived at Bir-el-Abd with a huge marquee and a thousand crates and cases—than which there could be no surer evidence that the 15th, without changing their position, had been changed from foremost troops to reserves. November had broken. And one afternoon the rumour ran among the bivvies that the mail was in; and immediately Tony became one of the many officers and "Other Ranks" converging at a run upon the Post Corporal's tent.

"Lieutenant O'Grogan? Yes, sir. Some for you. Quite a lot, I fancy."

"Oh, good!"

Never had such a sheaf of letters been put into his hand. Walking back to his bivvy, determined not to read them till he should be within the privacy of his blanket walls, he allowed himself no more than a glance at the handwriting of each. One from Honor. One from Jill—bless her! One from "ma-in-law"—hallo! she didn't often write—bless her too! One from his mother—how shaky her hand was getting. One of course from the devoted Peggy, for Peggy never failed to write; he had known Honor fail one week, and hadn't she heard about it!—Gosh! what a strafing he had sent!—but not once throughout two years had this best-loved sister neglected on her Sunday night, after a day of spiritual gorging in church, to sit down and write to him one of those chatty

confections that only she could mingle. The honest truth was that, as a letter-writer, Peggy outshone Honor by a few hundreds of candle-power. One from Joyce. Hallo, this one was from Father Michael surely! Yes! "On Active Service"—"Field Post Office"—and censored by himself: "M. Saffery, C.F."—for Michael Saffery had left the ranks some time ago and taken a chaplaincy. First time that Peggy's husband had written to him for years! Strange how they had always tacitly distrusted each other, he and Peggy's husband. One from—good lord! one with a French civilian post mark from the poor old father who had left them ten years before. How funny that all the letters should arrive together, as if it were his birthday or something. Almost everyone had written—except Keatings and Derek, who, like most brothers, never wrote at all—blast them!

But wait: why should Joyce's letter, Peggy's, and his mother's all be in separate envelopes? Were they not still living together in the Chiswick home? The postmark on all three was "Chiswick." H'm, funny! For a moment he had a wild fancy that the award of some medal to him, or a mention in dispatches, might have been published, and they were all writing to congratulate him.

He was now at the opening of his bivvy, and he dipped his head and flung himself on to his valise, and, resting on his right elbow, prepared to enjoy his magnificent mail. Put them in order—the least important first, the best for the end: Father Michael's on top of the pile, and Peggy's last but one, and Honor's at the bottom. He broke Father Michael's envelope.

"My dear old boy . . ."

Quaint opening from a tacitly hostile brother-in-law, but then didn't Father Michael always show something of the professional unction of a High Church priest?

"I hasten to add my voice to all the others that must be offering you their deepest sympathy in this terrible hour——"

Hell! what was coming? What was he working up to, with his preacher's language?

"—even though I realize that my voice, brother-in-law though I am, is almost an outsider's at such a moment, and that, however stunned I myself may be, I have not the same right of grieving as my darling Peggy has, and Joyce and you, and your poor, poor mother. Keatings was a great fellow

behind his mantle of cynical humour, and Derek, despite his undoubtedly less lovable nature, was a fellow of sterling worth——"

O God! . . . Keatings *was! Was!*

Derek *was!* . . .

Tony heard a suppressed moan in his bivouac: it was his own. He repeated it: it eased him. With his lips far parted, as of a man whose breath is shortened and disorderly, he read on hurriedly.

Keatings and Derek both killed in the last phases of the Somme battle. Keatings killed in an attack, while leading his company over the top; Derek, who had transferred to the Tanks, as Derek, the motor expert, would, killed by a shell in his disabled tank which he had refused to desert. They had not wired the news to him, thinking it better to break it in their letters.

Oh . . .

All the letters had the same motive. Numbly he read them. Honor's beginning, "Tony darling . . ." Jill's beginning, "Dearest, dearest Tony . . ." Peggy's ending, for her heart, as ever, had taken command and forced her to send, not the comfort she wished to send, but her own pain: "Oh Keatings, Keatings—Tony, what are we to do without him? And darling, darling old Derek . . ." His mother's fretful and wailing: "Can't you come home now? Two is enough for any family to give." And his father's perhaps the most pitiable of all: "Do you suppose my boys forgave me before they died? Write and tell me they did, Tony; and live yourself, *live*, if you wouldn't break an old man's heart. . . ."

Keatings *was*.

The brutality of that word! It was merciless; it gave nothing. Keatings, funny old Keatings—he who, ever since their mother had bowed before the assault of life and abdicated, had been the anchor of the family, in his quiet, undistinguished way—Keatings is no more. And Derek, the family's mystery man—the family's joke—Derek, the secretive, the self-sufficient, the lonely—Derek is no more. He just *isn't*.

Tony gathered the letters together and walked out into the desert. There was a fullness in his throat and a welling in his eyes that must be carried away from the neighbourhood of men. He wandered a long way over the dips and rises of the desert, till he stood in a shallow depression, far from sight

of the scattered bivouacs, far from the murmur of men; and the silence of the sands was all around him. Here he threw himself on one elbow and palmed up the sand and ran it through his fingers. Now that this fullness in the throat and welling in the eyes had come so far, let them break through. Let them break: one would be easier then. And one had only to think of Keatings as he had been. . . .

Oh, God. . . .

And Derek. Derek at that Family Reunion, when he had come in and, with his heavy seriousness, told them about the rumours of war in the City, and bragged a little of the motor-lorries and tractors which his firm had already begun to design. It would mean good fortune for all the partners, he had said, thanks to their good foresight. Foresight! When Derek said that, he hadn't foreseen the tank. Poor old Derek! it was like him with his heavy conscientiousness and unhumorous slavery to conventions, to stay in his disabled tank and perish with it. . . . Derek, the lonely, in his tank. . . .

Tony shamelessly cried, putting his face on to his arm and burying his sobs in his elbow's crook. Then he felt better, and sat up again.

And he thought: wonderful how the irresistible power of England's ethos, filling her schools, her churches, her streets and her city offices, had turned these unbrilliant Irish brothers of his into two of her typical sons. Keatings always putting up a smoke-cloud of grumbling humour and quietly getting on with his job behind it—that was she. And Derek—he was that other, but older-fashioned and rarer thing (Tony smiled affectionately as he thought of it), he was the England that, void of humour, blunders along in a heavy-armoured tank of conventions, mounting a single gun, her stolid puritan conscience. Yes, it was rather good to perceive that they had become typical of the thing that he loved.

Night was drawing over the desert; he must return. And, just as he was about to clamber to his feet, he was suddenly horrified to discover in himself a little focus of pleasure—pleasure at the thought of the interesting figure he would now present to the battalion's officers and men, who had just heard in his mail that two brothers had been killed. Good heavens! —a shudder went through him—was it so that he could feel that? Oh no, no! And yet—Tony was always frank with himself—the temptation was undoubtedly there. Oh no. . . .

Keatings . . . Derek . . . God! what was he thinking of? How quickly and how treacherously did the deathless egotism of a man shoot out its forked tongue and poison him! No, no. . . . In his resolve not to give one inch of ground to this hateful temptation he pillowed his face in his elbow again and thought hard of his brothers, and of their long childhood together—picturing—picturing. . . .

Now he lifted his head. He would say nothing to anyone of what he had heard. Thus would he be sure that the poison had not worked in him. Yes, that was what he would do. For such a thought to have visited his mind at all was condemnation enough—a condemnation that shuddered through him.

Quieted by his resolve, he rose up and rambled back.

Recently C Company had procured a small square Indian tent for their mess, and into this Tony entered now. Dinner was soon on the little table, and during the meal he tried to play his customary part, though now and then he drew a chaff about his silences. After dinner they asked him to play bridge, but he declined, saying that he did not feel like it to-night. So Scrase and Moulden, Aylwin and Harold made up a four round the table, while Tony sat on a box smoking a pipe and pretending to read. And he passed through a strange experience. In the first minutes his consciousness apprehended the usual cries, "Two No Trumps"—"Three Spades"—"John, bring some more whisky"—"Four Diamonds"; and then all these voices died out and he was playing in the Children's Room of his Kensington home, or sitting through a Children's Service in his father's grey church while the afternoon dusk deepened in the aisles, and the verger lit the gas brackets one after another; or he was romping on the downs above Freshwater Bay with Peggy and Joyce and Keatings and Derek, and presently words were uttered, "Two Spades"—"Double Two Spades"—"Content," and his wits refused to come together and tell him if it was Joyce or Peggy or Derek who had called, "Two Spades"; he struggled to force them together, and sharply the synthesis fell into shape, and he knew that he was in a little two-pole tent in the Wilderness of Sinai, while Keatings and Derek were six feet under the earth of France.

"Your lead, Moulden. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

FOLLOW THE ENEMY HOME

HE was glad to leave Bir-el-Abd, when two days later the battalion received orders to march forward and take the van again. Once more the 15th were in column-of-route, their boots fumbling through the soft sand, their sweat falling like thunder-drops on their shorts and drying immediately in the sun, their helmets pushed back, their faces toward Jerusalem. They plodded on, bowing their shoulders under their weighted packs like Bunyan's Pilgrim (though, to be sure, that godly man carried the burden of his own sins while these excellent blaspheming Christians carried the burden of the sins of the nations). They plodded on; and not thirty minutes of the march had gone before the leading men turned on to the main track beside the railway and found their feet treading upon wire.

"Wire! Wire!" went the familiar warning from mouth to mouth down the column.

But it came with laughter; and the men behind were at a loss to understand why the cry of "Wire! Wire!" should seem so funny. Usually it meant nothing more than that the march was crossing some telephone wire which signallers had laid upon the ground, and that all men must lift their feet so as neither to trip nor break the cable. Evidently to-day it meant something different—something hilarious. And was it imagination to suppose that the pace of the column had quickened and that those in front who had yelled the word were marching briskly, cheerfully—even springily?

"Wire! Wire!"

The back of the column had the answer quickly: their boots stepped off the fatiguing sand and trod the Wire Road.

This was the first time the 15th had met the Wire Road, that simplest and most illustrious participant in the conquest

of Sinai. Aye, there were three great partners in the conquest of Sinai; and they traversed the desert side by side: the Railway, the Pipe-line, and the Wire Road, and the greatest of these was the Railway, and the slowest was the Pipe-line, and the cheapest was the Wire Road. It was simply four breadths of chicken-run wire-netting pegged down side by side. Such a road could be laid over the dunes, and away towards El Arish, just as fast as four men could unroll the rolls of netting, and four more could drive in long pegs with a mallet. It held up the feet of the marchers from sinking in the sand and probably increased the mobility of the army by fifty per cent.; and a surprise mobility was the master-key to the problem of outwitting the Turks in this wilderness of immobilizing sand. The Railway was no surprise, nor the Pipe-line; Fritz knew the last word about them; but from his great height he could hardly guess the Wire Road.

A new merriness swept down the column as it made its acquaintance with this most welcome relief. Here was opportunity for Joe Wylie. "Someone's a bloody genius," shouted a voice; but Joe called back, "Don't be too 'appy abaht it. They'll make us double on this, like as not. . . . Double, lads, double! Knees up nah! Bring them knees up. Lift 'em up!" This earned for him the usual laugh, so when he had ceased laughing himself, and withdrawn his hand from covering his bashful moustache, he strove to go one better. "Gaw! Can't keep this pace up. I feel like a bleedin' telephone message travellin' along the wire." To which a voice answered: "A damn rotten message for Johnny Turk." "Yuss, you're right there," admitted Joe. "They'll jest abaht crumple up when they know old Joe Wylie's comin'. Casey Jones"—he had blossomed into the celebrated song:

> "Casey Jones, mounted on his engine,
> Casey Jones, his spanner in his hand,
> Casey Jones, mounted on his engine,
> Took his famous trip to the Promised Land.
>
> "Casey said, If you want to flirt,
> Never get a girl with a hobble skirt . . ."

The men around him were in full chorus now, and he felt that it was up to him, when the improprieties of Casey Jones had died away, to lead his following into another song. So he started, "Oh happy band of pilgrims, If onward ye will

tread . . ." and as this proved a sure "laugh," he capped it with a second hymn. These were hymns that Quickshaw had ruled out of his parade services as too horribly appropriate to the present campaign, but which, for the same reason, had appealed most strongly to Joe Wylie. "Through the night of doubt and sorrow," he drawled, "Onward goes the pilgrim band, Singing songs of expectation, Marching to the Promised Land." And this second hymn was his biggest success that sunny day on the road to Mazar.

But even the Wire Road could not make a seven-hour march over the soft, monotonous hills and under the broiling sun anything but a thew-aching, breath-beating exercise, and soon the laughter and singing were left abaft; and the men were tramping through the hours—tramping, tramping, tramping, on the chicken-run wire, heads down, shoulders bowed and sweat falling. Past Railhead; past the Gyppy gangs who were raising up the viaducts or shovelling out the cuttings; past the 52nd outposts; and on through the loneliness of the unoccupied wastes ahead; on, with the officers' maps out, to track their way to a map-reference at Mazar. Now the Wire Road stopped, presumably because it could not advance into a yet unguarded country, and their feet sank and splashed again in the yielding sand. Some homing pigeons passed over their heads, flying towards the base, and Joe, gazing up at them with opened mouth, suggested: "'Ello! 'El*lo!* They're taking an S.O.S. back, they are. Guess that means the kevelry's bin all cut to pieces in front of us. We're *for* it, boys, if you arst me. . . . *Yurse,*" he concluded with rich appreciation, "that means we're *for* it."

It was twilight when they halted at a desolation which the Colonel said was Mazar.

Once again their first few days in the new advanced position were jumpy days. A Special Order spoke of the proximity of the Turks, and forbade any lamps or candles in the bivouacs after 22.30, or any lighting of fires before the morning "Stand to" at 04.00. Men were to watch the eastern horizon for white flares or red flares which would signify that the cavalry had got into touch with an advancing enemy. They must be on their guard, also, against the German and Austrian spies who might come as mounted officers, dressed in a British uniform and speaking a perfect English.

Brigade was so apprehensive of these subtle and crafty

visitors that their promptness in action led to one of the most famous adventures of their very famous padre. One of these sinister apparitions was reported to be on his rounds, and an order was sent to every unit for his arrest at sight. Padre Quickshaw chanced to be dining with Colonel Tappiter in Battalion Headquarters when the order came. The Colonel and the Adjutant, the M.O. and the Q.M. were disputing as to whether it was possible, by talk sufficiently unchaste or by other means, to bring a blush to the cheek of their spiritual adviser. There was a wager formed on it. The Colonel held that it was possible—he was always romantic. The M.O. and the Adjutant were confident that it wasn't possible—they were realists both. The Q.M. was neutral. And now they were putting the matter to the test, for there were fifty piastres to be won. The Adjutant told a story, and Quickshaw only laughed, "Haw, haw!" The M.O. told a worse—a professional one; and the Colonel loudly claimed that there was the faintest tincture on the priestly cheek, and that the piastres were his; but the others, after the closest scrutiny, disallowed it. A dish of Maconochie stew was brought in and the Colonel asked Quickshaw, "Padre, do you know what a Maconochie is before it is tinned?"

"Lord, no," laughed Quickshaw. "Nobody does."

"Well, that's where you're wrong, padre. *I* do," said the Colonel. "I'll tell you. Once there was a very amorous old cockerel, a tough old bird, and he fell in love with a rabbit, and the rabbit granted him her favours, and the result of this —er—this——"

"*Crime passionnel*," supplied the M.O.

"Yes, whatever that means," said the C.O., "—the result of this union was an animal called the maconochie——"

All laughed and there was a further close examination of Quickshaw's cheek. The Colonel put up his spectacles for the scrutiny, and just as they were pronouncing the results negative, a runner from the Orderly Room entered with a telegram for the Adjutant. The telegram was from Brigade. It stated that during the day a man on a grey horse had been visiting scattered sections of the R.E.s and other divisional units, and making inquiries about the number of men at each post and the nature of their work; it gave a full description of the man, "short, round-eyed, sparse-haired, rather untidy in appearance, wearing artillery boots, Army Ordnance riding

breeches, and an Indian puggree tunic, but without any badges of rank or any regimental emblem or flash ; " and it concluded by ordering his immediate arrest by any unit among whom he might appear.

The Adjutant, suspecting nothing, read out the telegram to the little company at dinner. It was Padre Quickshaw who startled them by saying, " Good God ! Joo think they mean *me ?* "

And beyond doubt he was blushing.

All besought his meaning.

A grin bent the corners of Quickshaw's mouth. " Well," he said, " it describes what I've been doing all day. When I got here I discovered that there were all sorts of small units who hadn't seen a padre for years, so I took a horse—that damned grey of Hartley's too—and rode out to find 'em. And yes, I remember asking more than one N.C.O. how many men he'd got, and when they were free, because I was thinking of giving them an evensong some time or another and wondering how many hymn-books would be wanted. Joo think it's *me ?* "

The disconcerted stare of Quickshaw's protruding eyes, and the deepening blush, evoked an uproar.

" Blazes ! it's the padre," cried Colonel Tappiter. " But, padre, come, come : they wouldn't call you ' untidy.' . . . No, it can't be you."

" Besides," said the Adjutant, " you must have told them who you were, didn't you ? "

" I don't know," answered Quickshaw. " I thought I did, but perhaps I forgot to."

" Artillery boots." The Colonel's head came up from beneath the table where he had been scrutinizing the lower parts of Quickshaw. " Army Ordnance breeks—which, by the way, have probably never been paid for—padre, *do* say that you were wearing a puggree tunic this afternoon——"

" I was."

" Splendid ! It *is* the padre. . . . Padre, I put you under instant arrest. Ring up Brigade, Eadie, and tell 'em we've got their man."

" Yes, sir," said the Adjutant, jumping up. " And should I arrange for a firing party in the morning to shoot him ? We've plenty of men available with nothing much to do. They'd enjoy a little job like that."

" Better ask Brigade first," recommended the Colonel seriously.

"Idiots!" Quickshaw was always rather tongue-tied when under fire.

"Better ring up Brigade at once, Eadie," said the Colonel.

"Paw!" scoffed Quickshaw. "I should have thought a man of the Colonel's age would have had more sense. . . . Eadie, of course—he's still a child."

The Adjutant took no notice.

"Should I mention that he has been identified as the C. of E. chaplain, sir?" he asked of the Colonel.

"*H'm*. . . . Yes." Colonel Tappiter only gave this "yes" after much rumination. "Yes, tell 'em—only it'll cut 'em to the quick. . . . Cut 'em to the quick to think their padre's been selling his country. The Brigadier'll be heart-broken; he loved him—loved him like his own son. So did the Brigade Major."

"Idiots!" repeated Quickshaw.

"Right, sir," said the Adjutant, and ran out.

"Here!" Quickshaw called after him.

"No. No good, padre," the C.O. counselled. "Too late, too late. . . . Well, this is splendid! Damn! bring some more drink, Barnes. Padre and I are going to split a bottle of whisky over his untimely end. Yes, we must all drink with him before he dies."

For a quarter of an hour the Colonel, Doctor and Quartermaster kept up the raillery, allowing Quickshaw no opportunity for retort. As sure as he parted his lips for utterance, they condoled with him afresh, or discussed with one another their sadness at losing him. Then the Adjutant returned.

"I've got him off, sir," he reported.

"Well, *there's* a friend for you, padre!" said the Colonel. "How did you manage it, Eadie?"

"I suggested that now we've got as near to El Arish as this, nothing could be more likely than that the padre would be out looking for the Promised Land."

"Damn you!" muttered Quickshaw.

"And the Brigadier suggested that it would be quite possible he was looking for the Lost Tribes——"

"Yes, yes," agreed the M.O. "Or Moses' grave. Moses was buried here somewhere, wasn't he?"

"Well, I've met some childish senses of humour in my life," began Quickshaw, "but——"

"Splendid!" cried Colonel Tappiter. "He's saved. The

padre's saved to trouble us a little longer. Hell! we must have some more whisky on this. We must wet the padre's release. Honestly, I'm glad, padre, on the whole. We'll have a special *Te Deum* next Sunday at Church Parade—yes, and—'Now thank we all our God'—make a note of that, Eadie."

"Right, sir."

And so they continued, baiting him.

That night Tony awoke in his bivouac with the sudden sense that there were footsteps without. Quietly, his heart fluttering, he rose on to his elbow and bent a straining ear towards the sound. They were the steps of one man only, and seemed to be walking away to the north. The memory of all the spy-talk rushed upon him, and, because his vitality at such an hour was at its lowest, he remained on his elbow, fixed by a fear which had enlarged beyond reason. He did not breathe. Only he turned his wrist soundlessly that he might see the face of his watch. It was eight minutes past three. He could not hear the steps now, and, as his heart steadied, he began to wonder why the voice of the guard had not sounded in the night with its challenge to a moving figure. His fear was now swallowed up in an eagerness to win the honour of having captured single-handed a prowling spy while the camp slept. He scrambled out of his valise, crawled on his knees out of the low-pitched bivvy, and stood erect at its entrance, revolver in hand.

There was no one to be seen: to left of him the brown bivouacs of Scrase, Moulden, Aylwin and Wimborne stretched down a gentle slope, laying their shadows away from the moon; in front of him the brushwood dappled the desert to the furthermost tilt of the sands.

Disappointment succeeded to eagerness; and he was wishing that that eerie sound of a movement through the loose sands might perplex his ears again—he had abandoned hope of it and was sinking into melancholy small-hour thoughts of Keatings and Derek—when, of a sudden, he saw a figure rise up from behind some scrub and walk towards the bivouacs. The figure appeared to be clad in loose-fitting trousers and jacket of a light colour: pink or cream. There was nothing

furtive about it, but something sad: its head was bent towards the ground. As it came nearer Tony withdrew into shelter and dropped to a sitting position. The figure had not observed him, he was sure; but it was coming straight towards his bivouac, or towards Scrase's, ten paces away.

Soon he knew who it was: it was Kit himself, wandering about the desert in nothing but a pink silk sleeping suit. He slunk further under cover, not liking that Kit should be embarrassed by discovery; and he saw him arrive at the entrance of his own bivouac and stand there, as if repelled from entering it again. Now Kit was lighting himself a cigarette, and the hand which held the match was shaking. . . . And now—it was done before Tony could elude it—Kit had paced in front of him and seen him where he squatted.

"Allah destroy you!" cried Tony with a laugh, thinking it best to cover the incident with gaiety. "You frightened me out of my wits. I thought you were a spy."

"Hallo, Bungay!" Kit had reciprocated the laugh. "You rather frightened me too—suddenly materializing out of the ground like that!"

"What's the matter? Can't you sleep?"

"No; not too well. Thought I'd try a stroll."

"Yes, but it's so cold, old thing. Gosh, it's perishing!"

"Yes, I'd begun to notice that," laughed Kit.

Tony, looking up at him, saw that his whole body was shivering.

He saw another thing to-night: he noticed, as never before, the exceptional physical beauty of Scrase—the tall figure with its wide shoulders and shapely breast, the slim limbs, the round but noble young face where intellect and youth met in genial dispute; the eyes, searching and sensitive, but lively too; and, crowning all, those volutes of strong fair hair with which the gods so often crown a form that has delighted them.

"Confound it, old man! You'll be chilled through," Tony rebuked him. "Get your British Warm if you want to drift about like this."

"Oh, but I'll be turning in again now. It helps you to sleep if you get really cold."

"It does. A little too much of it, and you sleep for ever. Which would be a pity, wouldn't it?"

"Well . . . perhaps you're right. . . ." Scrase said it laughing; and hesitated a little longer. "Well, good night."

"Good-night—or good-morning, rather."

Scrase had wandered back to his bivouac, and Tony could hear him enveloping himself in his sleeping valise.

Tony did not get into his own bed: thoughts were coursing too rapidly through his brain. He knew that Kit, had he possessed the slightest ability to speak of his own feelings, would have liked, in that moment of hesitation, to pour out some story to his friend, as he had done once before on the road to Pelusium; but his nature had inhibited the utterance, and he had turned away to suffer alone. Ah, but why? . . .

Probably not till this moment had Tony measured the depth of his affection for Kit; it seemed to well up and rush forward to that bivouac beside him.

One thing he did not perceive, but it was true: the realization of Kit's physical beauty was playing no small part in heightening this affection. It had always been the same with Tony O'Grogan—ever since the cherubic face of little Wavers had troubled his early schooldays: the delight of the eye could carry him at a breath into an unreasoning love. And now, in the throbbing of this heightened affection, he leapt up, seized his British Warm, and, flinging it on, went across to Kit's bivouac.

"Asleep, old man?" he asked, peering in.

"No."

"Well, may I come in and talk a bit?"

And before an answer could come, he was sitting at the foot of the valise.

"What's wrong, Kit?" he demanded. "I know you're worried. Do tell me."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Yes, it is. . . . And I'm not going till you tell me, if I sit here all night. You took me into your confidence before."

Kit did not answer; and Tony encouraged him with a laughing, "Come on!"

"I had a perfectly putrid dream," Kit confessed, sounding the note of levity too. "I get it often now; and it always plays me up in this way. Sorry: it's damned silly, I know but I can't help it."

"I don't suppose it's silly at all. What is the dream? It sounds interesting," Tony chaffed.

Scrase hesitated, and then said, "Did you know that we were going to attack the old Turk very soon?"

"I didn't."

"Well, we are. Any day now. I heard it yesterday; and I suppose that brought on the dream again. I—I always dream that I'm in some trenches on the Peninsula, waiting to take the company over in the first wave of an attack, and the moment comes, and I climb out, and my body, despite my will, is somehow or other going the wrong way; I try to force it round, but it goes on independently of me—and the men call to me to come on, but something prevents me turning round—I *can't* —and then I'm awake. It sounds nothing when told baldly like that, but it's hell to go through, Bungay—absolute hell. . . . Oh, but it's nothing. I don't want to worry you with it."

He said no more; and Tony spent a long minute preparing sentences of consolation or advice, but jettisoning them all. When he spoke, he hardly cared what he said: he had spoken only because the silence was becoming oppressive.

"Wouldn't it be better if you got a staff job, old man?"

"Tono, it's like this," said Scrase, after he had made up his mind to unload his full thoughts. "There's a kind of clash in me between two—I don't know what to call 'em—'loyalties,' if you like: there is a loyalty to my conviction—which may be wrong but is mercilessly clear to *me*—of the bestiality of all this slaughter; and there is a loyalty to the men—to the army—to the country, if you like, in this shocking mess-up into which we've all got ourselves. Well now: to be loyal to the first and to cut and run from everything seems so much the easier solution that I feel pretty sure it's the wrong one. . . . You see, I feel that I ought to be prepared to suffer something along with the men, and if *my* little bit of suffering is mainly mental while theirs is physical, well, perhaps that's a fair arrangement! D'you know: all the mere physical discomfort and pain is nothing to me—I rather enjoy it, because it eases my mind! It's only the idea of attacking again which plays me up at times——"

"But in a staff job——" began Tony.

"Oh damn, no!" Scrase protested. "To take a staff job would be a mean denial of both loyalties: it would be to run from my little bit of discomfort, and at the same time to be doing all I could to prosecute the war. No, I'm not going to do that. . . . It's different for other men, I know," added Kit, with his quick generosity, "but that's how it would work out for me. No, we've all got to stick out something; and

I'll stick out my share. . . . And I don't feel that so far it's made me let the company down in any way——"

"You can be quite sure of that, old thing," said Tony confidently. "Old Tap thinks a hell of a lot of C Company."

"Well then, there we are!" laughed Scrase. "Let's get on with the war! I say, Tono: I should never have believed that I should tell all this to you. I don't know how you got it out of me. I haven't told it to another soul. Oh yes, I have, though: to one other."

"Who was that?" asked Tony, surprised at his jealousy of this other one.

"Old Quickshaw," answered Kit, grinning. "Yes, Quickshaw, of all people. He blew in one day and just ordered me to get off my chest whatever was on it. The old padre has a side to him that few people see. He said that I needed someone to confide in, and that I was to go to him and vent everything on him whenever I was in the mood. He said, 'That's what I'm for. God knows what else I'm for!'"

"And did you go?"

"No. I could never bring myself to talk to him again. But it's a kind of support to know that he understands."

In his faint jealousy Tony immediately applied these words to himself.

"Well, you've told *me* now, old man; and I understand it all—I swear I do. I—I—well, you know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, rather!" laughed Kit. "And thanks awfully."

"Well, cheerio."

"Cheerio. And don't worry about me. *I'm* all right."

Tony returned to his bed, but he did not fall asleep for a long time. Though he was hurt for Kit's sake, he was happy too. Amazingly happy at having learned the depth of his friendship for Scrase.

Morning was coming over the sands of Mazar. Very lovely were the November mornings before the sun was high and hot, and while the desert floor lay yellow in the tempered light. The sky was still blue and unblanched, and the scrub patches threw their violet shadows westward. An early morning parade was over, and an early breakfast eaten; and Tony

stood by his bivouac laughing loudly at Childe Harold, who was vigorously bathing his naked body in the public gaze. Harold's bath was a saucer-shaped hole in the sand, which he had lined with his ground-sheet and filled from two canvas buckets of water. Tony tossed handfuls of sand at his gleaming body, and hastily loaded a sponge with water and aimed it with a perfect trajectory at the nape of his neck, and—and then admitted again the aching memory that both his brothers were dead.

Keeping up the laughter as a curtain for his thoughts, he strolled slowly away. His wandering brought him to the horse-lines, where, on a sudden impulse, he borrowed the Transport Sergeant's mare and cantered over the dunes towards the brittle salt-flats that lay to the north of Mazar. Anything was better than mouching about the camp or lolling with his thoughts in his bivouac.

Besides, he had an idea that if he rode far enough he might see the Mediterranean. On the map the line of their advance from Kantara to Mazar had inclined steadily upward towards the Mediterranean, which it designed to meet when it entered the little seaboard town of El Arish; and here at Mazar, only some twenty miles from El Arish, if you deviated a little to the north, you came to the end of the rolling dunes and found a vast salted plain which looked very much like the beginning of the sea's marge. It stretched unrelieved to the shimmer along the horizon; and surely, thought Tony, if he were to ride out to that shimmer, or, rather, if by going steadily towards it, he were to push it steadily back, he would unveil the Mediterranean.

To canter on this crunching sand was good; the mare delighted in it, and Tony enjoyed her exulting and his task of holding her in. Quickly the plain behind widened and widened, but not so the stretches in front, which always remained the same; for the shimmer receded at the rate of their advance and never disclosed anything but the same flat plain.

But no! Was that not a mound forming itself in the haze—a little low mound like the hummock at Pelusium? Yes, the mound had disengaged itself from the haze and stood solid on the plain. Now he had something at which to direct his horse's head: he would go as far as that mound, climb it, look about him, and return. Near the mound the sand became soft again, and scrub reappeared, so that he began to suppose

that it was only a little range of dunes. Of course! what else had he imagined it might be? Not another Pelusium. Pelusium was scarcely twenty miles from the Canal, and one could believe that the Nile had once watered it; but now he was eighty miles in the desert and there would be no Pelusium here.

He started at the sight of a human figure. It was coming round a shoulder of the billowing dune. But why start? Another man had as much right as he to feel the beckoning of a far off, isolated hill; and this was a friend—an Australian or a New Zealander of the Light Horse—at least he was dressed as one.

The man had perceived his approach, and stood to await him.

"Hallo, digger," he greeted, as Tony cantered up and dismounted. "You aren't a spy, are you?"

"No," answered Tony. "Are you?"

"No. But say: how the devil am I to know if you are speaking the truth or not? Honestly, *are* you a spy?"

"No, I tell you."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Well then, I'll talk to you. I think I believe you."

"Same here," said Tony.

"I guess you're another explorer like me."

"Why, is there anything to explore here?"

"*Anything to explore here!*" exclaimed the Australian, as if doubting his ears. "*Anything to explore here!* Didn't you know this was El Flusiat?"

"Never heard of it."

The Australian mentioned the name of his Saviour, and spat.

"Come and see," he said.

He led him round the flank of the hill and pointed.

"There! How's that, eighty miles in the desert?"

Tony was looking upon the ruins of ancient houses. Their lower parts were buried under the sand, and their upper parts, which stood like jagged teeth above the surface, seemed to have been but recently uncovered.

"Some of our fellows have been digging here," the Australian explained.

"Was it a city?"

"Um." This was the Australian's "yes"; and he accompanied it with a nod.

"What was its name?"

"It's called El Flusiat now, but I'm told its name was once Ostracena, and it had its own bishop and all."

"A bishop?" Tony was incredulous.

"Um. Come and see."

He walked Tony another fifty yards over the recently disturbed sand, and again pointed; after which he fell to picking his teeth, that the English officer, at his leisure, might drink in the sight before him.

"Good God!" exclaimed Tony.

"Um," said the Australian.

The whole ground plan of an early Christian basilica lay beneath their eyes: there in parallel rows were the white marble bases on which the arcade of pillars had once stood; here and there lay some of the broken pillars themselves; yonder at the eastern end was a big rectangular block that might have been the altar, and behind it, in a semicircle, ran the tumbled wall of the ambulatory, the sand driven against it and over it.

An inexpressible sadness descended upon Tony as his eyes loitered on the ruins, and as his fancy saw the congregations of fifteen centuries ago singing their hymns among these columns and praising their God. Where were they now? Somewhere in the sand far beneath his feet?

And if in those days they had foreseen their temple thus!

"Gosh! it's sad, isn't it?" said Tony.

"Um," admitted the Australian.

A city that was. . . .

Then, as the first warmth of his interest diminished, he felt again the settled ache that was hiding somewhere behind his thoughts and remembered its cause. Keatings. Derek. Time had buried them out of sight, with their ambitions and their gaieties and their pride, as yesterday it had buried the pride of El Flusiat and to-morrow would bury him. . . .

A family that was. . . .

It is not a pretty matter to realize completely the impermanence of everything and the impermanence of oneself; and now Tony was looking straight into the merciless eyes of this thought—as he had done once or twice in his life before. He looked at it fearlessly and shrugged his shoulders. To what end his present friendship with Kit Scrase? "Ah well," he said, and turned away.

He exchanged a joke with the Australian—that figure out of the mist whom he would never see again—and mounted his horse and rode home.

They spent a month and more at Mazar, while the railway came up and passed them, and other battalions overlapped their outposts and became the van. But they were waiting for the end of all this. Beyond Mazar the railway could only advance a little way, because, twenty miles on, El Arish faced its approach, and the Turks, if the reports of their activity were correct, were going to fight for El Arish. It was the door to the Holy Land and Syria.

So the 15th at Mazar were full of the expectations of battle, and daily out of the east, along with the dawn, came flights of rumours from the troops in front. But nothing else for a while: Mazar was empty of incident; only there were the periodic raids at the breakfast hour, the march of scabies among the men, the sudden threat of a cholera outbreak, and, when the tooth of December lengthened, the blinding, maddening sand-storms.

When the sand-storm rioted over Sinai you packed up your face in your blankets and lay prone upon the ground; and if at times you dared to uncover your eyes and see how the day went, you saw that all the contours of the desert were changing under the blown sand; it came driving over the cornices of the high dunes in lovely cascades and parabolas, and everywhere the holes were filling up and the hills dwindling. The sun—even the Egyptian noonday sun—had lost its light; a flying veil of sand obscured it, and the day was grey. That was all you saw, for such a glimpse was bought only at the price of sand-stung eyeballs, and you hurriedly buried your face in your blanket again, and breathed as best you could, ever and anon shaking off the weight of sand from your body.

Very suddenly one evening the camp came astir. The signallers were rolling in the telephone wires; the Dump men were sorting stores hastily and blasphemously; officers were conducting rifle and ammunition inspections; two companies were marching in from outpost duty, having abandoned their posts on a sharp order; and the Brigade Major was closeted with the Colonel in his tent. And here—here, by your leave,

came a string of French cavalry riding along by the railway. Frenchmen, *mon Dieu!*

What was the game? The signallers, over their rolls of telephone wire, were confidential. They whispered, with nods, that the moment had come for the move on El Arish; but it was a secret, mind you, and so all orders were being carried verbally to the commanding officers. Artillery, cavalry, mountain batteries, camel corps were concentrating in the neighbourhood of Mazar; and the whole ruddy outfit would march forward as an army to-morrow. Yes, the Bikanir Camel Corps had arrived, and the Australian Camel Corps, and the French Cavalry, because we couldn't, for political reasons, enter Syria without the French coming along too. They had to be given a kind of watching brief.

Sacré nom! Tony was delighted—thrilled—and ran off to find Kit Scrase, forgetful for the moment of Kit's fear; forgetful of his own secret ambition; possessed by nothing but a sheer, unexamined excitement.

Was Scrase a little white? Perhaps; but he was giving his orders promptly and efficiently. And when he paused, he turned and asked, "Have you observed what day this is, Bungay?"

"No."

"December the 19th."

"Golly! old man! so it is!"

"It's the anniversary of the evacuation of Suvla, and the last attack on Cape Helles," explained Aylwin, who was standing by.

"We knew that," Scrase suggested cynically.

"I wonder if it's intentional?" murmured Tony.

"Of course it is," Aylwin pronounced, speaking with authority. "We're going to——"

But Tony wasn't listening to him. He was thinking of Kit. He was remembering what the 19th of December of a year ago had done for him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST MARCH

THE 20th of December in a year long dead, 1916. It saw the most wonderful march, the grandest to the eyes, that Tony had known or would ever know. Who dared deny that war, however it might insult the reason and the conscience, could be beautiful beyond language to the eye—could feed, as nothing else, with many delights some detached, æsthetic hunger in men, which recked nothing of morals or utility or personal gain? All that day the great concentration of forces, in eight or nine parallel columns, went forward over the sand dunes and across the mile-wide sand-flats: whole divisions of infantry in one column, with their transport in another at their side; the brigades of artillery in a third column, every battery of four guns drawn and convoyed over the sands by a hundred and thirty-seven animals; the heavy guns in a fourth column, each single gun dragged on its lumbering caterpillar wheels by no less than thirty-two horses, in eight rows of four abreast; six thousand pack-camels padding along in a fifth column and a sixth and a seventh, their white-gowned Egyptians leading them; beyond, the strings of Ambulance Camels with the hooded stretchers swinging on their flanks; then the splendid turbanned warriors of the Bikanir Corps, and the gay, devil-may-care Anzacs, on their high trotting camels; overhead the guardian aeroplanes wheeling and banking; and all these columns—so wide the desert stretches—coming often into a single view, as they toiled along in clouds of sand and dust; and over the immense picture a brilliant sun which gave precision to every detail—heavens! it bettered the dreams of John the Divine at Patmos. Thousands upon thousands, and more than man could number; nations and languages; men and machines and beasts—so the Desert Column, its career at a climax, went forward to El Arish, with all its pageantry arrayed.

Singing, joking, inspired, lifted above themselves by the spectacle, the men of the 15th tramped on, in the column that was theirs. The dullest of them felt their minds queerly alight, and needs must shout in jest or song. As for Tony, there was a kind of sparkling ecstasy in his throat; and he sang loudly when the men sang. He sang till his throat was hoarse—and then abruptly—unsought—there shaped themselves in his mind the words, "An army that was."

All this was but the matter of a day. The twentieth day of December, 1916; and the day was already dying.

The march went on, but Tony had ceased from singing. His column carried him along with it, one very silent thinker. He was thinking of the impermanence and instability of all things, and of the utter loneliness of each human being during his tiny flash of life; how each was hidden away in the dark centre of his thoughts, of which only the fringes were visited by his friends, though they were his dearest. There was Honor his wife—he was feeling now that he wanted her to come very close to him while there was time; and Peggy too, the best of sisters, let them all get very close together and make the most of their little day. He imagined himself speaking to them: "Honor, are we close enough? The time is so short. Peggy, do you remember how Joyce said on that last night before I left for the Dardanelles, 'We must all live on top of each other when this business is over; because—oh dear, oh dear—I realize more and more as I get so horribly old that nothing matters in life except palliness and human relationships and—well, you know what I mean. . . .'"

Yes, by heaven, he knew what she meant.

He heard again the voices of the men singing. "What did I join the Army for? I must have been bally-well barmy;" and it was as if he had opened closed eyes, for he saw again the parallel columns—infantry, guns, cavalry, and camels—threading onward to the battle, in their clouds of sand and dust. And sharply he remembered that the morrow might give him the chance for which he had longed—the chance to perform an echoing deed and lay a lie for ever.

Was he so eager to do it now—now that he could see how his own death would complete the pain of his family—now when he felt that nothing mattered except that dear closeness which he was planning for the days after the war? Would he go out of his way to meet it? No. . . . Wait, though.

Remember Moulden. Remember Moulden talking to Aylwin and Wimborne. Oh, yes, he would, he would. He *must*. "I can't help it. . . . Just let me by one wild risky deed put Moulden to shame, and I'll worry no more. After that I'll take all reasonable care, for everyone's sake. . . ."

One more sin, said Ulysses, and then I will be good.

The infantry halted twice an hour, but the camels went steadily on; so that at twilight, when the 15th were reaching the position which would be the sally-port for the attack, the camels had long been out of sight. But now a most displeasing odour was filling the air; and it thickened as they marched into it. Rounding the profile of a dune, they learned what it was. All the six thousand camels had been parked here in long lines with their white-gowned Gyppies among them, one to each string of three; and the conglomerate smell of six thousand pack-camels, with two thousand Gyppies mingling their handsome quota in the general sum, was as unacceptable an experience as the men of the 15th—even the oldest veterans—had been invited to endure. They marched past the camels, cursing and spitting and calling upon Allah.

"Well, that's aboot blown the gaff, any road," shouted Jim Stott. "The Turk'll know we're coomin' now. He's not above ten mile off."

"*Wurl*, it'll save us a fight anyway," answered the voice of Joe Wylie. "Johnny can't stand this. He'll run. See, boys, we're smokin' 'im aht."

"Well, Ah reckon it's not fighting fair," said Jim Stott.

"Gahn!" called Art Webster. "Johnny won't run. 'E won't even notice it. He smells the same hisself."

They left the camel park behind and entered a long drooping valley between two downs of scrub-covered sand. Here the vast host of infantry that had gone before them was already at rest, their arms piled and horses tethered in line upon line across the valley floor. Far in front, at the mouth of the valley, the cavalry and artillery were parking limbers, guns and horses in similar parallel lines. When the companies of the 15th had filed into their allotted spaces, and the officers were going to their quarters on the slope of one of the hills where they could overlook the whole magnificent array, Tony glanced

about him and significantly sniffed. Eyes and nostrils were telling him that he had reached at last the far fringe of the loathly desert that they had laboured for months to cross. There was a scent of green things here—faint, but wonderfully suggestive after its year of absence—and see! the sands were growing a curious kind of lily, colourless and crinkled by the sun, but a hint of better things, nevertheless. Scrase, what ho! the desert blossoms!

All agreed that here was a slight but undeniable change in the desert's face, and Aylwin, who had set up as an authority on the Natural History of Sinai, gave an account of his feelings on the march as he noticed the multiplying prints of wagtail, pigeon, quail and desert lark.

"Yes, we're getting very near the land flowing with milk and honey," said Tony.

"Of course we are," said the naturalist. "Isn't El Arish its border town? To-morrow, after capturing it, we shall only have to walk across the Wady El Arish and we shall be standing in the Promised Land."

"Go on!" exclaimed Scrase. "Fancy that now! Did you know that, Bungay?"

"El Arish was the Rhinocolura of the Ancient World," continued Aylwin, unabashed. "I'm looking forward to seeing it to-morrow."

Childe Harold gaped at the name.

"Well, I hope it keeps fine for you," he said.

The night was upon them or ever the last arms were piled. And like all Egyptian nights, it was cold. Down on the valley floor every group of a dozen men made a scrub-fire, which flared and crackled and shot up in showers of sparks. Round these they gathered and sang Christmas carols and sentimental songs; it wanted only five days to Christmas. "Christians awake" merged into "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night," which succumbed beneath the gathering chorus of, "You great big beautiful doll." The drinking songs followed: "Here's good health to the quart pot, pint pot, gill pot—have a drop, little drop more——" and most stirring of all on that battle eve: "For to-night we'll merry be, to-morrow we'll be sober."

The ecstasy was in Tony's throat again. To lie on the slope of a hill and look down upon line after line of camp-fires whose glare lit the concave plain and reflected itself on the piled arms

and the gun-wheels and the horses' flanks and the faces of singing men, while songs came up with the rose-dyed smoke, and the horses champed—this was the game of war as the gods designed it. You in France, with your underground moling, could keep your wretched travesty. Who would stay immobile in a muddy trench when he could be camping at large under the desert sky and before the gates of El Arish?

Moulden came up to Tony, and looked down upon him. A half-smile played upon his harried, ambiguous face. It was exceedingly uncomfortable to be approached by Moulden like this. There were times when Moulden's expression, since you could not read its meaning, left you in that embarrassment which comes when someone asks you a question which you would fain answer to his satisfaction but do not know the answer he desires; and so you can only stare back at him, and try to appear at ease. Tony did this now; aware of an awkward grin on his own face, and ashamed of it. Moulden and he had long since agreed, by tacit advances to each other, to bury their quarrel out of sight; but they still fled each other, whenever possible, and nursed their nerves in the security of separation. And Tony now, his heart ever so slightly quickened, wished that Moulden would explain this approach and go away.

"Do you mind if I talk to you a minute, O'Grogan," said Moulden.

"Not at all. Sit down."

Moulden, however, did not sit down; he turned his eyes adrift and gazed at the soldiers encamped in the valley.

"D'you know, I just wanted to say——" he emitted an uneasy laugh—"h'm, it's really rather difficult—really." His face twisted.

"Well, let's have it," said Tony, laughing in return.

"Well, you see anything may happen, of course, to-morrow, and—and I've been thinking I'd like to feel absolutely friendly with you—I mean, absolutely *quite* friendly before—in case anything happens to either of us—and I want to apologize for something. I want to be perfectly plain and above board, if you'll let me——"

(Oh my gosh, what a gift this man had of doing the wrong thing and doing it badly, so that his listeners suffered!)

"It's not easy for a fellow to confess something, is it?" said Moulden, his eyes disconcertingly fixed on Tony's.

"No," said Tony, having nothing else to say.

"No, but after thinking it all over, I'm going to do it. I suppose you'll admit that, from the first—somehow or other—we rather failed to hit it off together, didn't we?"

Tony admitted nothing; he held his peace, he was so uncomfortable.

"But honestly, I didn't bear any malice against you, and I think you misconstrued a lot of things that I said and did; but after that time when you came and were rude to me in my cabin—you were rather rude, really, if you remember—well then I really did feel vindictive against you. I should have done better if I'd had it out with you at once, because these things fester if they're bottled up, don't they? but I didn't—stupidly enough—and I think it's possible I've let myself be a bit unfair to you in my talk—one *does*, you know—and I should feel much happier if I could put it all right before to-morrow, see?"

(Oh God, this was awful.)

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Tony. "It hasn't worried me. At least, if it did at first, I've forgotten all about it."

(What a lie! Oh, why wouldn't the fellow go away?)

"No, but I feel that, if I've done anything to injure you, I should like to apologize for it. I should, really."

"Thanks," said Tony. "And same here, of course."

"Thanks. . . ."

"So we're good friends now, O'Grogan?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

And since Moulden did not speak, Tony added, "That's all right, old man."

"Good! I'm frightfully glad about this—really. And I've long wanted to say how sorry I was about your two brothers. It's terrible—really. I would have spoken at the time, only I didn't know if you'd welcome it, see?"

Tony looked up, surprised.

"How did you know anything about them?"

"Oh, someone saw it in the paper. We've known about it for a long time now, but Scrase concluded from your silence, that you'd rather we kept quiet about it."

"How like old Kit!"

"Yes, and he was quite upset about it, really—I believe."

There was a silence.

"Well, I'm frightfully grateful to you for this conversation," said Moulden, moving at last to go.

(Thank God.)

"Oh, that's nothing, old man. Thank *you*."

"Well, good-night."

"Good-night."

Allah! what a scene! "One part sincere and three parts histrionic," was Tony's measurement of it, "and the whole a very unpalatable draught;" though he was ready to allow that in the tortuous places of Moulden's soul the lights were too dim for him to analyse the mixture he had brewed. And, anyhow, it was impotent to heal the low-lying tumour which ate in Tony's thoughts, impairing, however faintly, all his happiness. A private apology from Moulden left the Brigade a-whisper still. No, his ache could only be rooted out when, by some dazzling action, he converted the whispered calumny into shouted applause. And Moulden must see it done. Moulden must watch him sipping the sweets of a triumph over him.

To-morrow, perhaps.

He lay and dreamed; he dreamed of what he would do to-morrow; and as he looked down upon the field of fires below and heard the songs, he dreamed of epic poems he would one day write, though he suspected he would be too lazy ever to write them. At 20.30 all lights and fires were put out, and the roofless city below him with its thousands and thousands of sleepers became gradually silent and invisible, as the embers died. Only the horses champed and pawed the ground. Above him the stars were brilliant: the Milky Way arched like a bow over the outspread army, and Orion slanted behind the ridge of the opposite hill. Childe Harold, who lay near him in a hole he had scraped in the sand, slept heavily, his snores muffled in his blanket. Harold could sleep, because he lived for the moment only, free as a child from speculation or care; a little further away Scrase lay sleeping too, but restlessly.

For his own part he found the night much too interesting for sleep; and long after midnight he sat up, with his blanket over his head like the veil of a Mahommedan lady, and lit a cigarette. And the first thing he saw was a large and uncannily brilliant star hanging low in the east, over the Holy Land. He had heard of this star; those who watched in the small hours had spoken of it, and the romantic among them said that it

was the Star of Bethlehem, the star that the Magi saw. Well, it must be to-morrow now. What had the day in wait for him? If only his great opportunity was to come to-day. He wanted it—aye—even at the price of death. And he *felt* somehow that it was coming to-day; he persuaded himself that he had a presentiment of its coming. And on this most stimulating thought he had just lit another cigarette when he heard much movement among the cavalry far away in the valley's mouth. They were saddling their horses, undoubtedly; and the shouted orders of their officers had a note of urgency. What were they up to? Now they were riding out of the valley, and hark! unless his imagination were playing him a trick, they were hurrying eastward towards the enemy, some at a canter and some at a gallop.

Now what could that move have meant? Lying down again to think over it, he carried the problem down into his sleep and lost it there.

Next morning the infantry marched into El Arish without firing a shot. The Turks, surprised by the suddenness of the British march and the power with which they had come, had scuttled amain from their prepared positions and retreated eastwards. The British cavalry had gone out early in the morning to ring round the town and to follow up the enemy.

Unhurrying, the 15th padded into the midst of a little congregation of white Oriental houses, that, sprawling down a hill-side, called to mind the pictures of Nazareth or Bethlehem. Only women and young children watched them. And these sad-eyed Rachels, with the pitchers on their heads, heard the impudent gallantries shouted in the language of England's streets—"How art going, lass?" from Jim Stott. "Bonn joor"—and gazed uncomprehending; but the little brown boys met the flippancies and grimaces with an answering grin, and even exploited the hour by begging for *bakshish*. The men were happy. Disappointed at first to have been denied a fight, they saw now that the great spectacular march of yesterday had been the battle, and this was their triumph: so they hid their satisfaction and grumbled; they grumbled about this Eastern warfare where the cavalry got all the fun while the infantry did all the work, and they loudly wished that they might be sent to France

where the infantry were the boys and the cavalry skulked behind.

Tony's disappointment was deeper, but he marched on with the rest, laughing. He was getting inured to these blows. Damn! it really looked as if the fates were against him. At Romani his chance had slipped from his reach just as he marched up to it; and now at El Arish it had eluded him again. But never mind; the war was still only two years old and his day would come. And what if, in the light of this lively morning, both Moulden and himself were feeling rather foolish as they recalled their talk of the night; what if each was detecting the other's discomfort and avoiding him? Confound it: there seemed to be a curse upon their relations; but he wasn't going to worry about it this morning.

Thinking thus, he suddenly remembered Kit Scrase; and he decided to lose all disappointment in joy that Kit had been granted a reprieve again—Kit, his friend who had confided in him. Gosh, how much better one felt when one escaped for a while from the deathless egotism into thoughts of someone else!

Yes, he was excitedly happy this morning. He had caught the high exhilaration of the troops, when long months of labouring across the resisting sands were crowned with a bloodless victory; when the desert was behind them, and a town of houses around them; when women, no matter how quaint and alien, looked into their eyes, and children ran beside their march; when the gulls, perching on the roofs, spoke of the nearness of the sea and, to be sure, the roar of the Mediterranean was in everyone's ears; when the Wady El Arish, fringed with trees, suddenly came full into view, and they cheered, because they knew that they had only to stroll across its dry bed and they would shake off Egypt from their feet and stand in the borders of the Holy Land. Aye, truly, about the morning there was all the air of a Grand Finale.

And for them it *was* a Grand Finale. They had spent but a few days in their new camp, bathing in the Mediterranean, playing with the children, helping the women draw water from the wells, and offering unlimited sugar (which was scarce in England at the time) to the domestic camels and donkeys and goats and doves; Christmas was hardly past and the year was still two days from its death when the word "France" went racing among the men and formed them everywhere into

excited and chattering groups. The whole division, said the chatterers, was to be moved from this part of Egypt: not a doubt of it. A job in Sinai was done; other men would carry the war into the Holy Land; and themselves could be spared. The Quartermaster's boys had had it from the R.T.O. that on Tuesday next eight trains would be waiting to take a great portion of them right back to Kantara. From Kantara they were to march to Moascar, where the division would concentrate; and what did that mean if not transportation by sea, and—France? Salonica?—stuff! don't you believe it! Salonica—thump! There was nothing doing there. It was France. And they weren't sorry, neither. Fed up with chasing Turks and scavenging up the desert. It was time they became soldiers.

Scrase brought the news into C Company's mess, their little Indian tent.

"It's France, children. Now we're really going to war."

"How do you know?" said Moulden.

"C.O.'s just told me."

"Well, hurray!" said Tony.

"*Eggs*-actly!" agreed Childe Harold. "I'm quite keen on fighting someone for a change."

"I'm not," Scrase laughed. "I've no quarrel with El Arish. Seems to me a pleasant spot: sea view—sea bathing——"

"Same here," announced Moulden.

"Same here," Aylwin said. "I'm too proud to fight."

And Tony would have liked to associate himself with the jest, but remembered that for him it would be unwise.

"Oh yes, but you lads have seen the war on Gallipoli," continued Childe Harold. "I haven't. And I'd like to have a squint at it before I die."

"You'll see more than you want of it, in a month or two," suggested Scrase.

"No, I shan't. As soon as I've seen enough, I shall cock my leg over the parapet and hold it there till it stops a Blighty; and then I'll take it home and show it to the family."

"Which reminds me," screamed Aylwin, not with his usual dignity, but as if he were in an apocalyptic ecstasy: "we shall get leave, we shall get leave, we shall get leave;" and he hammered each joyous repetition on to the table.

Hughes Anson came hurrying in with Quickshaw.

"France, boys," said he. "Here's Padre got it straight

from Division, and what are padres for if it's not to get us the news? We leave for France to-morrow."

"Tell us something we don't know, Rosy," said Aylwin.

"Right you are, curse your father. Aylwin's a self-opinionated little ass—you didn't know that, did you? And altogether you C blokes are rather a piffling crowd, Allah destroy you. Third-raters, all of you. C Company's easily the worst in the battalion. Did you know that?"

"Oh yes, we knew that," said Aylwin.

"But of course," conceded Hughes, "it's Allah's will that you should be so, so it's hardly your fault. Allah is greatest."

Childe Harold gazed up at him, unangrily.

"Ain't he witty? Anything more to tell us?"

"No, except that you'll all be dead in six months."

"No doubt," agreed the Childe. "Have a spot of whisky?"

"Don't mind if I do. . . . Thanks. May your wealth increase. . . . Yes, all dead and then you'll wish you were back in El Arish." He drank the half of his ration.

"Never mind," said the Childe, now ministering to his own cup. "Quickshaw'll bury us. It'll give him a job of work for a change. These padres have too lazy a life altogether. *I'm* going to be a padre in the next war."

"No," pronounced Hughes. "Quickshaw'll be dead too. Allah is merciful. Last padre I heard of who went to France was killed almost at once. Trod on a land mine, the silly goat. Yes, and he went up to heaven like Elijah sitting on a cloud."

"Confound it, Hughes," objected Moulden. "Tell us about someone who went to France and *lived*, will you?"

"Well, you needn't worry about *me*," Quickshaw interpolated. "I think I shall go home, now that we're going to France. I reckon I've had about enough of this."

"Oh no, padre; no, padre," all protested. "Mustn't desert us in our hour of need."

"Pooh! I shan't break my heart about *you*," scoffed Quickshaw.

"Curse his father," said Hughes.

"But frankly, Rosy," pursued the Childe, sitting with a knee grasped in both hands, "just tell these gentlemen, will you—you who have been to France (and God help us, you blow off enough about it!)—tell us what are the chances of going to the pleasant spot and still remaining on the earth."

"Practically none," Hughes answered promptly, and drank again and wiped his mouth. "Don't you think so, padre?"

Quickshaw nodded. "Not much chance," he said.

"Of course not. Isn't that why I came away?"

"Well, then, here's to it," said the Childe, reaching for the bottle.

"No, practically none for a junior sub, that is," corrected Hughes, and took another sip. "I don't mind telling you that I expect to get through it myself; now that I'm a captain, but you—pooh!—I wouldn't give twopence for your chances."

"I wonder who'll succeed you in the command of A Company," said the unperturbed Harold, into his mug. "I've a sort of feeling that *I* shall."

"*You?* Pfoo!" sneered Hughes. "Foul offspring of a race of swine! Give me some more whisky. . . . Thank you. *Thank* you. May your night be happy and blessed. . . ."

Altogether it was a very hearty conversation. And two days later a procession of trains rolled westward, the trucks packed with the heartiest men, whose singing echoed in the empty dunes and whose songs became cheers each time they rolled into a station that themselves had helped to make. Mazar—Bir-el-Abd—Romani: in a single day the train rolled them down a track they had given months and months to building. What an ironical cheer for the old Pipe-line, which was still lagging miles behind the army! "Oh, oh, oh, it's a loverly war." What gratuitous mimicry for each gang of grinning Arabs whom they passed at work upon the permanent way! "Aye-yah-*la!* Aye-yah-*la!* Aye-yah-*la!*" What laughter for the stone offices which the Gyppy State Railways were now building at the stations which themselves had guarded. "Blimey! looks as though they thought the railway'd stand up." Darkness was down on the scrub while they were still this side of Pelusium; and in the darkness what were they to do but troll their songs, if, perhaps, more gently. "The roses round the door, Make me love mother more. I shall see my sweetheart Flo, And girls I used to know. . . ." Pelusium behind. "Good-bye-ee, good-bye-ee. Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee. Though it's hard to part I know, I'll be tickled to death to go. . . ." On through the darkness to Kantara, with a fountain of sparks and flame-hued smoke blowing from the funnel ahead like a banner. And beyond Kantara—France! "I miss the rooster, The one that useter Wake me up at

four a.m." "*Put that light out!*"—Joe Wylie's voice to the banner of sparks, and a roar of laughter. "Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag, and smile, smile, smile! While you've a lucifer to light your fag, smile boys, that's the style. What's the use of worrying, it never was worth while. . . ."

O perished voices, that might not abide with us. Never a music shall visit our hearts like your music, blithe souls of yesterday. There, in the dusks of yesterday, you are singing still.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE BILLETRIX AND THE BATMEN

THE 15th Royal West Essex met the France of 1917 when they found themselves billeted in a little village twenty-five miles behind the old Somme battlefield. The officers of C Company, perhaps, met France at its best. France, in the person of Madame Liercourt, welcomed them into her cottage, and on the whole was very good to them, if peevish at times. They called Madame Liercourt the Billetrix. She was a peasant woman of fifty, very large and round. Scrase, after paying her the first civilities and watching her massy hips retire through a door, described her with the words *rotonde immense*, for Scrase, since his arrival in France, had discovered to his friends an unexpected but not unamiable weakness for parading his French. The phrase *rotonde immense* impressed Childe Harold very favourably, who reflected on it for a space and then, pretending to a perfect understanding, said, "*Wee, wee, mon capitaine; oh, wee, wee;*" and again, with a Parisian shrug of his shoulders, "*Oh, mais wee, mais wee.*" Moulden laughed, though he understood no French at all. Moulden's ignorance of French, even of its pronunciation, was a perpetual irritant to Tony; not, of course, because it proved that Moulden had enjoyed very few advantages in his life, but because it disproved all the lies he had told about his private school education, and he seemed to lack the intelligence to see that it disproved them. Pretentiousness is an irritant at any time, but when pointed by stupidity it is intolerable.

The Billetrix was dressed in a blouse and a short skirt that, hanging from her wide hips, reached no further than just below her calves; and her feet and ankles were encased in man's boots much too large for her. "All French peasants' skirts are short like that," said Harold wisely; and Aylwin

corrected him, saying it wasn't a skirt at all but a petticoat, whereat Harold rebuked him for knowing anything about such matters. But petticoat or not, the lady wore it in the rooms of her cottage and in the streets and fields of her village.

Madame the Billetrix had a tall husband; and a son, a huge farm lad of sixteen years. Wife and husband were remarkable for having, both of them, the right eye permanently closed. "I'd like to have seen that fight," said the Childe. But he made this humorous remark before they properly knew the Billetrix and her good heart. After a week of her clumsy kindliness they believed the villagers, who told them that Monsieur Liercourt and Madame his wife had but one eye apiece when they married. Young Liercourt had two eyes; and two fine bright ones at that.

If Madame the Billetrix and Messieurs her menfolk were large, the billet was small. The street door ushered the visitor into the Living-room, upon which two tiny bedrooms opened and a tiny kitchen; and next to the kitchen there was a narrow barn. One roof covered all this, and a garden of vegetables surrounded it. In the day time the five officers messed in the Living-room; the five batmen cooked and messed in the tiny kitchen; Monsieur Liercourt and the boy had their meal on the farm where they laboured; and poor Madame found a corner of the kitchen fire where she could cook her panful of coffee, and a few inches of kitchen table where she could place her porringer and spoon.

Madame was very shrill and noisy, as she sat in the kitchen with the five batmen around her. Of her courtesy she talked to them in that pidgin-French, that *lingua franca* which had been left with her by the hundreds of English "tommees" who had passed this way before. Her talk was naturally loud, and since she imagined, like the batmen and all simple people, that unintelligible words would be better understood if they were shouted louder and louder, a very large proportion of her conversation came through the closed door of the kitchen to the officers messing in the Living-room. Her "*Très bon! Très bon!*" was shrieked with delight as she grasped the meaning of some nonsensical tale told her by Joe Wylie or Art Webster. Her question "*Compris? Compris?*" when she desired to know whether her French-English had been understood was for ever shrilling like a bird-call above the gabble in the kitchen.

At times the gabble became a din. One day Scrase, indignant at such uncontrolled mirth among the batmen, walked towards the kitchen to establish order. He opened the door and said, "*Bonjour, Madame,*" and, having looked ineptly round, added "*Il fait beau temps, n'est-ce pas?*" He and Madame passed the time of day in a few more helpless sentences, whereupon he closed the door and returned to his seat.

"I suppose it's a shame to shut 'em up," he said. "The old lady's got the boys all round her like a hen with her chickens; and Joe Wylie's telling her some villainous pothouse yarn, at which she's rocking with laughter."

"Listen!" said Childe Harold.

For at that moment the Billetrix's high notes were heard shrieking emphatically, as she grasped the point of Joe Wylie's story: "*Ah, oui, ah, oui! Très bon. Très bon. J'ai compris.*"

"*Wee, wee, tray bong,*" corroborated Joe's rich voice; and he began to serenade her with a slow drawl of "Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall," breaking off to inquire: "*Compree 'sing,' Murdamme?*" And, to illustrate the meaning given by the English to the word "sing," he trilled up and down the whole compass of his voice.

"*Ah oui! Très bon. Très bon!*" shouted the Billetrix. "*Compris* 'sing.'"

"And 'sleep'? *Compree* 'sleep'?" It was Joe speaking again; and a snore suggested his pantomime.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Madame. "*Oui. Compris* 'sleep.'"

The rest of the linguistic obstacles having been smoothed out, one by one and very noisily, the whole song was sung to her in chorus by the men; after which her hands smacked together in vigorous applause and her laughter filled the cottage.

Then it seemed that Joe was asking her a very personal question for the laughter of the other batmen grew so riotous that it set all the listening officers laughing too. They caught the words "*Manger*" and "Frogs." Abruptly the uproar ceased, and a silence fell in the kitchen, followed by the noise of feet jumping along the brick floor, and peals of laughter from the batmen.

"*Oui. Beaucoup de grenouilles,*" shouted Madame in the most delighted voice of all. "*Manger des grenouilles. Très bon.* Vary good——"

"What's *greno-wee?*" Art Webster's voice interrupted. "*Nong compree greno-wee?*"

"*Comme ça! Comme ça!*" screamed Madame. And again the officers caught the sound of feet jumping along the kitchen floor.

Not in anger, but to satisfy his curiosity, Scrase went again to the kitchen door and opened it. He saw Madame in a great perspiration, sitting upon her heels and jumping from spot to spot on the floor. Around her stood the batmen in amazed appreciation. On seeing an officer at the door she rose to an upright position, and falling, very hot and tired, into the chair by the fire, began a rapid and voluble explanation that was too difficult for Scrase to follow. It was not to be suffered that the batmen should think him defeated by Madame's French, so he felt he must make some show of conversing with her.

"*Vous avez une grande famille maintenant, n'est-ce pas, Madame,*" said he.

"*Ah oui,*" the lady replied breathlessly. "Plenty 'piccaninny' *maintenant*——" The *Bon Dieu* alone knew from what itinerant English voice, as it chaffed the children of the village, she had caught this curious word—"*Très bons piccaninnies.*"

"*J'espère qu'ils ne sont pas méchants,*" suggested Scrase, and immediately blushed for his facetiousness; but he had wanted to say something in French, and these had been the first words that occurred to him.

"*Mais non, mon capitaine,*" she answered, as she wiped the tears of laughter from her open eye and from her closed one as well. "*Mais non. Tous les soldats Anglais sont très gentils.*"

"She gives you a good character," Scrase explained learnedly to the batmen.

"Yes, sir," replied the servants, who had witnessed with reverence the O.C.'s astonishing command of the French language.

"Well, then, don't make such a ghastly row in here. *Bonjour, Madame.*"

"*Bonjour, Monsieur.*"

Scrase shut the door and returned to his place.

"Madame's scarcely dignified," he said. "She's at present appearing in the character of a frog. But she's a good-natured old soul. Pity they're not all like her in France."

Before the others could reply Joe Wylie had opened the kitchen door and was standing in the room.

"Please, sir. Will you be wanting any letters posted?"

"No, Wylie, I don't think so," said Scrase, surprised at this dutifulness.

"Thank you, sir. . . . And please, sir, is there any word in French for slugs?"

"I suppose so, Wylie. But I don't know it. . . . Ask Mr. Moulden," added Scrase, who was never above the mischief of prodding at Moulden's lath-and-plaster shams.

Moulden didn't wait to be asked.

"I'm sure I haven't any idea," he laughed. "I've never had occasion to talk about slugs in France—really"—which was truer than he intended.

"No, sir?" Joe acknowledged.

"*Vers* is the word for worms," interposed the Childe, who suspected that the name of any unpleasant animal, moist and crawling, would meet Joe Wylie's need." "Will *vers* do for you, Wylie?"

"What, sir?"

"*Vers*. Worms."

"Thenk you, sir. *Vair?*"

"Yes."

"*Vair*, sir?"

"That's right."

"Thenk you, sir. Thet'll do me nicely." And Joe's long forefinger showed a tendency to go to his moustache, for the eclipsing of a grin. "There's nothing else you gen'l'men'll be requiring jest now, is there, sir?"

"No," said Scrase, to whom Joe had turned. "I think not, Wylie."

"Thenk you, sir."

And he took himself and his new information into the kitchen, where—so they guessed from the laughter that arose—he put his knowledge to the best possible use of knowledge, namely, to amuse and make happy his fellow men. "*Mangez vers, Murdamme?*" they heard, and Madame's loud laugh: "*Non, non.* Not good, not good."

"*Wee, wee.* Damn good!" protested Joe Wylie and Art Webster.

In the first days of their stay in Madame Liercourt's cottage, they thought that her good nature was of the absolute type

which never allows its possessor to be ill-tempered or querulous. But there came a dull cold morning when they perceived, as they sat at breakfast, that Madame was ruffled. With the abruptness of a person who is annoyed and wishes her annoyance to be known she walked back and forth from the Living-room to the Kitchen, slightly slamming the door each time; she rummaged in cupboards, whispering and sobbing to herself; she fussed at the fire when the officers had huddled around it to enjoy their after-breakfast pipes; and she paused sometimes to raise her apron and wipe her one eye.

The five officers could only glance at one another in impotent dismay.

"Good lord," said Harold with a glance at the large form of Madame before her cupboard door, "the old lady's got the almighty pip about something."

He said this aloud, thinking that his English slang would be meaningless to the Billetrix. But she heaved about the room, softly keening: "*J'ai compris ce que vous avez dit*—'old lady.'"

"Hush! She understood you," warned Tony.

Childe Harold's face coloured deeply as only a young face can. Like many English public-school boys who make a fine show of impudence, he was at heart a shy and nervously considerate creature; and the thought that he had hurt a woman of the poor sent the blood mounting to his fair hair. "Oh dammit!" he muttered. . . . "Oh hell! Somebody say something nice to her. Scrase, have a shot."

"*Nous sommes bien fâchés de vous déranger, Madame,*" Scrase ventured.

"*Ah vous ne me dérangez pas, mon capitaine,*" moaned the Billetrix, her kindliness flashing out from her gloom like the sun on a threatening day.

"Oh yes, I'm afraid we do," said Scrase. "*Je crains que nous*——"

Then Madame poured out her trouble, standing above them with her apron in one hand.

"The tommees occupy all the fire in the kitchen with their cooking, and these Messieurs surround the fire here. I have not place where I can put my little saucepan. To-day my husband will return and I cannot cook his little morsel of meat. It becomes quickly bad in the armoire. I would like that you be comfortable, but *moi*, I have not place anywhere. And

the weather is warm no more, and I am vary cold. If it were warm, I would sit tranquilly in the garden, but this is not possible."

Scrase jumped up with military decision. Now he knew where he was, and what to do. He flung open the kitchen door and stormed at the batmen.

"Look here, what the hell do you mean by crowding round the kitchen fire and not giving Madame room to cook her dinner? Clear out from the fire, I tell you. Take those bloody dixies and make a fire for yourselves in the garden. Wylie, get some of the ration fuel and see that Madame has a blazing fire for herself. The more she does for you, the less you consider her.

"*Non, non,*" screamed Madame, rushing to the aid of the bombarded garrison. "The tommees are vary good—*très bon, très bon. J'ai beaucoup de place* if I have a very little corner of the kitchen fire. It is necessary that they repose where they are."

Scrase, again bewildered, abandoned his attack on the servants and withdrew to his chair defeated. Childe Harold, seemingly, became possessed of a happy notion, and jumped up and placed the Company's gramophone on the table. He knew that the Billetrix always enjoyed this gramophone. It had been a fine instrument once, but nowadays its spring was somewhat war-weary and most of its records (as the Childe said) were "missing, believed killed." However, he started a seedy record on its merry-go-round, and a tune scratched in the room. Madame placed her hands on her hips and listened.

"You sing, Madame?" asked Scrase, hopelessly at a loss for something to say, but anxious to maintain the lightened atmosphere.

"Ah, before the war I often sing. But now—no more. *C'est la guerre.*"

The tune continued wearily.

"But you will sing again," Scrase pursued. "*Après la Victoire.*"

"*Ah non.* But I like your English songs. It is now two years since the soldiers begin to be billeted upon me. For six months the Poilus come and they occupy this room. Ever since then the English tommees come. Since eighteen months they come, and after a few days they go. Soon you quit my house, and others come and sit round the fire. But always

they sing their sad English songs: 'Zares a long, long trail a-finding. . . .' *Très bon. Très bon.* Vary good."

And Madame laughed heartily while the gramophone plodded to the end of its scratchy tune.

Harold put on another record; and the gramophone played to Madame Liercourt, "When you come home, dear, when you come home. . . ."

"You are very good to our batmen, Madame," said Scrase. "*Nos soldats disent que vous êtes bien aimable.*"

"Ah, I have not always been so, *mon capitaine.* For many months I was very tired of the soldiers who occupied my home and left no place for my husband, my son and myself. I grumbled and scolded. But I had an elder son in the trenches at Verdun, and one day I hear that my son is *mort. Compris 'mort,' Messieurs?*"

"Yes, we compris 'mort,'" said Scrase, grimly.

"*Oui, monsieur.* I hear that my child is dead. I suffer much, and all the while the English soldiers come and go. My soldier is dead. Since then I have learned to be very gentle with soldiers."

The Billetrix wiped her eye with a corner of her apron, while Childe Harold gazed into the fire, and Tony stared down at his feet, and Scrase, with his finger tips on the table, tapped out the tune of the gramophone as it played on heedlessly: "When you come home at eventide."

"*C'est très triste, Madame,*" said Scrase at last.

"Ah!" The Billetrix shrugged her shoulders. "*C'est la guerre.* It is the same thing in all the village. Madame Huppy has lost her husband; Madame Pont Rèmy her two boys. The son of Madame Doudelain is missing. Soon they will call up Georges my son. He has only sixteen years, but he is so big."

"No, no," Scrase demurred. "We're just going to finish up the war. That's what we've come for."

"The good God grant it," said the Billetrix. "But take care, *mon capitaine*, and return safe. You English officers are only boys. *Le jeune officier là—c'est un petit—n'est-ce pas!* And your soldiers are but boys. *Voyez-vous*, I have learned to be gentle with soldiers. But sometimes I am impatient and unkind. I forget how young are you all. I have been so this morning. *Pardon, mon capitaine. Pardon, Messieurs.*"

Two mornings later the battalion paraded in the Place. They

moved to the right in column of fours and took the road that, winding past Madame Liercourt's gate, shot away in a straight white ribbon, its poplars guarding it, over the fields and up towards the line. The children outside the École Communale shouted and waved; the girls at the windows kissed their hands; the widows wept a little into very clean handkerchiefs, and the old curé smiled and bowed, and—who could doubt it?—whispered his benediction.

When the column passed Madame Liercourt's cottage it was whistling; and Joe Wylie and his comrades, rifles slung at ease, tunics open at the throat, and steel helmets pushed back, had their "eyes left" that they might wink their adieux to the Billetrix at her gate. As Joe caught her eye he began to serenade her with, "Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall;" and she clapped and laughed and shouted "*Très bon. Très bon.*" Art Webster called out, "Compree 'frogs,' Madame?" and she doubled up with laughter: "Ha-ha-ha. *Mangez des grenouilles? Beaucoup de grenouilles.* Vary good." And Joe kissed his hand to her, and she pretended to be coy. And then the batmen were too far past to speak with her any more, so they turned their eyes front and joined in the general whistling and helped to carry it over the hill.

That was the last of the 15th Royal West Essex for Madame the Billetrix; and the last, they supposed, that they would hear of her. But it chanced that Aylwin was left behind to clean up the village, and he told the others in the evening that, when he passed the cottage, he saw the Billeting Officer of a new battalion talking with Madame Liercourt on her threshold. This stranger was asking her, shyly and apologetically as if nervous of a refusal, whether she could accommodate some company officers and their batmen; and the Billetrix was replying encouragingly, as if in wonder at his hesitation: "*Mais oui, Monsieur.* Plenty room. *Très bon.*"

CHAPTER II

SPRING AND SUMMER

THEIR first sector in the trenches was a quiet one. The war was quiet just now, both sides playing for position. Russia had gone out of the fight and was busying herself with her Revolution; but almost at once, as if this major crisis had decided her, America had come in on the side of the Allies. It was the spring of 1917, and the Germans had retreated upon the Hindenburg Line, so the 15th marched away from Madame Liercourt's village to a station, whence a train carried them over the old Somme battlefield and across the territory now recovered for France and into the ruins of Péronne. This journey was Tony's first approach to the quintessential War, which, as he had always perceived, was neither Gallipoli nor Sinai, but France; and he sat in his carriage, thrilled, with a map upon his knees. First they traversed the places where, in the days before the fighting settled down to trench warfare, the Germans had advanced on Paris, only to be thrown back. Here the few shell-holes had long ago silted up with mud, and were ablow with grass and flowers, and the old trench system was no more than a string of wounds that had healed into scars. This belt was a green belt. Then the train rolled callously over the actual trench lines where the two nations had faced each other for twenty months till they came to grips in the battle of the Somme. On Tony's map this belt was marked by a red line, but on the soil of France it was marked by shell-holes as close together as the holes in wire-netting; by trenches pulverized into ribbons of shapeless dust; by woods razed down to a bristle of splintered and cindered trunks; and by villages pestled into mounds of brick-rubble. Under the spring sun it was a yellow, dusty belt. Then they clanked over a third belt—the country just evacuated by the Germans; and here Tony

suffered emotions that surprised him. He who in his arguments at least had contended that the Boche soldiers were as brave and pitiable as our own, now felt an unreasonable vindictiveness constricting his heart.

The desolation of the Somme battlefield had not moved him so. But about the destruction now beneath his eyes there seemed a wantonness, a sullenness, a remorselessness; and it set him gloating over thoughts of a remorseless revenge. These villages and towns so gutted, silent and empty! These dwellings, town halls, schools and hotels all open to the sky. War, no doubt, but by God, then, let it be war! He rejoiced in the ceaseless roll and tremble of the English guns, which were sounding nearer every minute. When at Péronne they descended from the train, and marched by the ramparts of the stately and beautiful city overthrown, his vindictiveness possessed him completely. His thinking became muddled, and he wondered if vindictiveness was not a virtue rather than a vice; and by vindictiveness he meant, not merely the desire to chastise, but the desire to hurt. The exquisite church and many another noble pile demolished into ruin, and little standing but the bastions of the enceinte! "No," thought Tony, his jaw thrown forth, "I don't feel as if I were going to be troubled by Scrase's recoil from homicide."

Be it remembered in these saner, happier days that this was Tony's first sight of France.

One by one the men and officers, some of whom had now been two years away from England, were granted their leave. The seniors, and those with the longest service, went first; and daily the time drew nearer when the Adjutant would summon Tony and offer him a furlough of ten days. In the face of this oncoming moment a strange, unhappy revelation of his weakness was given him. There began a wrestling bout in his mind between his wild longing to go and the accursed thought that ever haunted him like a familiar, and insisted now, and insisted and insisted, that he must not be in a hurry to leave the battalion just when they had arrived into their gravest danger. But oh, as he thought of Honor meeting him at the station; of the Daubenys' home on Chiswick Mall where she was living with her mother; of Mrs. Daubeny, and yes, of Mrs. Daubeny's maids; and about his mother and Peggy in their house hard by—and about Jill Daubeny, lovely in her nurse's uniform, hasting from her hospital to meet him again;

as he lived through the gay programmes of Berkeley dinners and Strand theatres and Savoy suppers, and the nights in Honor's arms, how he trembled to be there! But here was the strange thing: quickened and throbbing though this hunger was, the *idée fixe* was stronger. No; they should *not* say that O'Grogan, smelling danger, seized every chance to retreat to safer places. Stronger than reason, this rooted fear of being thought afraid! Reason argued that he would be a fool to decline his leave when one after another had taken it and gone cheering—but the opportunity came and he refused it.

"Thanks awfully," he said to the Adjutant, "but I think I'd rather go later."

And as he came away from the Orderly Room he doubted if he had served any purpose by his action; for to no one would he frankly explain, "I'd made up my mind that I wouldn't go till I'd seen some fighting," and odds on they'd think that he had some trouble at home and didn't really want to go. Not *want* to go, *nom de Dieu—de Dieu!* when his heart——

But enough! One was a fool and a slave-mind, and there was an end of it.

Spring and summer must pass before his chance came again, and what had they in their keeping?

Spring; and they were taking over their quiet sector in front of Péronne. It must be recorded here, for those to unravel who can, that Tony's first sensation at the sight of trenches again, with their fire-steps and duck-boards, their traverses and bays, was one of delight. His blood, if not his brain, said "Aha!" to them, and smelt the battle. Let it be explained that they were good trenches, clean and tidy; and that a spring sun warmed them, while the birds sang. So quiet it was—a bomb or two, a shell or two, and a spatter of machine-gun fire at night—that but one significant thing happened to him during his long stay there. To the contemplative there is a fascination haunting a cemetery, and to Tony in his present mood of wrath against the enemy there was another, less dispassionate, motive which sent him walking one day towards a huge enclosure of German graves that lay a kilometre behind their company headquarters. Hundreds and hundreds of crosses! It was good to think that the guns of France had exacted so high a price from the cold-blooded Destroyers. He entered and wandered from grave to grave. This was the time when the press at home had made a

reverberating noise of the German Corpse Factory story—which asserted that the Germans sent their corpses to a factory to be melted down for grease. The grotesque tale had worried Tony: it was a nasty hint that the humour of the English, which was his admiration—and, more, his justifying creed in these warring years—was not, after all, as transcendent as he had imagined: that it was not going to be strong enough to stand up against the onslaught of such a war as this. *Diable!* hadn't he himself felt all humour depart from him as he gazed at the relentless German destruction? . . . But that might be the Irishman in him. . . . So thinking, he moved among the graves. Each was beautifully tended, a border of box framing it, primroses and forget-me-nots blowing on its mound, a handsome gabled cross standing at its head, and a wreath of laurel or fern resting against the cross. They were all the same; all made to a pattern. And, passing on, he came to a line of graves whose crosses bore the inscription, "*Hier ruht in Gott ein Englisher soldat*," and the same care had gone to their making, box around them, primroses and forget-me-nots blowing over them, and a wreath of laurel resting against the cross.

His heart softened. Almost he wished he had not seen these English graves. A fighting arm which had stiffened was now unnerved again. And he wanted it to be strong for the English. He loved the English—that was the truth of the matter. All that immense power of love which had troubled his boyhood—since it had found no complete satisfaction in a single person—seemed to have burst its containing banks and spread over England in her hour of danger, and over England's men. He didn't want to doubt them; he dared not doubt them. He would have prayed now, had he not long ago abandoned prayer; and his prayer would have run, "O God, keep the English humorous and tolerant above most men, as they have been and are; keep them the old infertile soil for bitterness and hate, that I may be justified in fighting for their preservation, their power and their increase."

Perhaps he did pray thus, though the words were not framed, as he stood by the English graves which enemy hands had tended.

Spring of 1917. Summer of 1917. They were interspersed with events as stimulating, as moving, or as numbing as any

he had so far known in war, but they came to mean very little to him when they sank behind the terror of the autumn. Roisel, Epéhy, Villers Fauçon, Courcelles, Havrincourt—these were the names that ruled the months before September, 1917; these were the booths where the dramas were acted, but what were their petty scenes of cut-and-thrust after the dark phantasmagoria of Passchendaele had overlaid them? Very small entertainment indeed. Memory scarce troubled to keep their record; it had the sterner stuff of September–October to play with. Here a death and there a death; now a nervous night of digging in No-Man's Land; now a reconnaissance raid with heart thudding, and now the staccato excitement of the foe's avenging sally, for he comes always to return the call, grimly humorous Fritz—at the time these were colossal matters to write to Honor and Peggy about, but after the autumn —how small! All Tony's war in the West was an advance towards Passchendaele's autumn, and a decline from it.

Just a few events cry out to be told.

Spring; and they were back in reserve in a ruined village. Here they discerned a grievous billeting problem; no one knew which of the cellars or which of the gutted houses would be the next to "go up." The Germans had hidden their mines everywhere, and these mines, so one was assured, might explode to-day or months hence, for they were worked by some sort of corrosive acid. Most of the intact houses were branded with notice boards: "Dangerous. Walk or ride clear of this building." Aylwin saw a fine barn with a clean, tiled floor and four walls and an untouched roof, and he at once supposed that he had solved the billeting problem, and thanked God that he was not as other men; but Weymann yelled out, "Don't go in there! It's too good to be true. We expect it to go up any minute. See that ruined cottage there? A whole battalion headquarters—Colonel, Major, Adjutant, M.O. and Padre—went up there a few days ago. They are all buried side by side in that cemetery."

Later Tony was informed that the Town Major of this village, a fiery little captain ten years above military age, made a point of billeting the Boche prisoners in this luxurious barn; and the information distressed him. Here again was English humour failing. . . . But law! there must be exceptions to every rule.

His final billet while in reserve was a dug-out cut by the Germans in the bank of a sunken road. Here he lived with

the worms and the field rats, under the roots of the hedgerow above. He was very proud of this home and would bring in friends to see the table and chair he had made, and the hat-rack and wash-stand; but all the while the birds refused to recognize it as the abode of a human being: they would come flying in, singing as they came, and perch on what they took to be the roots of their hedge up above, but was really Tony's hat-rack. He would move forward to touch them, and they flew in panic away, disconcerted to find a human being in an earth that seemed to be the house of Brother Mole.

While they were here, the Sinai dispatches were published. Many of our friends were mentioned in these dispatches: Colonel Tappiter, Hughes Anson, Padre Quickshaw, Scrase. There was no mention of Tony. The Colonel had sent up his name, but Brigade had not forwarded it.

Never mind. The autumn offensive was coming.

Early summer now; a warm, shining May; and the men of the 15th are living underground in a fairy-tale wood. The wood of Havrincourt! Why is it that Memory, when bidden unload the war, *will* throw up scenes of high spirits and laughter? Is there any significance in this predominance of the laughter over the pain? The *Bois d'Havrincourt!* What a dream it is! The trees, being dense, are straight and tall: ash trees, beeches, silver birches, elms. The undergrowth *is* a tangle of luxuriant grass, fern, bracken, raspberry-cane and bramble. It is a bluebell wood if ever there was one; and besides the bluebells there are white hyacinths, lilies of the valley, and a crop of tiny yellow nettle flowers. Men live either in excellent burrows or in wood cabins. When it is fine, they feel like Robin Hood and his Merry Men; when it is wet, like the Babes in the Wood. A far corner of the forest is held by Brother Hun, and it is strange to look through the trees and to know that he is in the same wood with us, somewhere beyond the thicket. Often he sends his shells screaming over, and *crack* goes a stout tree, split like a twig. And we *gott-strafe* him, too; and the same cuckoo wakes us both in the morning.

There is a gas alarm in the Bois d'Havrincourt, just before midnight. The strombos horns sound in a long-drawn moan,

like the noise that sings in one's head when the ear-drum is disordered. The gas-gongs clang. Tony leaps out of his bed, six feet underground, and wonders where on earth—or under the earth—his gas mask has got to. Finding it, he hangs the box respirator in the "alert position" and scrambles from his burrow. It is dark among the boles, for though the new moon is just above the trees, it is too young to give any light. Against the darkness the alarm-rockets shoot up everywhere, dropping their golden rain among the branches. And everywhere men in goggle-eyed masks are issuing from dug-out and funk-hole and bivouac, and running to one another with news. The wood seems full of hobgoblins holding high revel under the moon. All very beautiful, but can we be dreaming? The Gas N.C.O. literally noses round for a smell like chloride-of-lime or one like lilac; the first will mean chlorine gas and the second phosgene. But he can track no smell at all, and Tony believes him disappointed. Art Webster's voice is heard shouting indignantly, "'Ere, what are they doing about them 'orses and mules?" "I dunno," says Joe Wylie. "They were provided once with flannel masks, but the mules 'ave eaten theirs. Guess they're *for* it, pore b——s." But the wire comes, "Gas Clear," and all unpinch the pincers from their noses, and wonder if their nostrils will ever open out properly; and so to earth again, and to bed.

Is there anything more dreamy than a night of labour in No-Man's Land? The working parties parade under the trees at nine o'clock pip emma to go out and dig a new trench between our line and the All Highest's. At three o'clock ac emma they will return—most of them, let us hope. They wax witty as they parade: they compose the letter of sympathy which their officer will write to their old people at home, "He were the best respected lad in his platoon." Christ! there's a pig of a moon coming from behind a cloud, and it gets brighter every minute. As we reach the duck-board bridge that spans the fire-trench and go clamping over it—"Break step! Break step! And shut that talking!"—the moon is abominably brilliant and we see ourselves for once as we imagine others see us: we feel very tall, solid, black shapes moving across the eyes of the Boches. The very barbs of our coiling wire, it seems, must be sharply defined to the All Highest's snipers and machine gunners. Oh, it's "creepy-crawly" now, as Peggy used to say. Going into St. Austin's church after

Father had started the service when we were a family of children, ten thousand years ago, wasn't half so creepy-crawly as this. It wouldn't do for Peggy and Joyce and me to do this thing together, for we never have succeeded in entering any such quiet place without sooner or later making a noise by overturning something or falling over a hassock, and then giggling. The men make very little noise. They remember that letter, "He were the best respected lad in his platoon" and prefer not to risk its being sent. Praise God that No-Man's Land is a thousand yards wide here and all littered with fallen trees and standing stumps where the enemy, before retreating, laid waste a width of the forest that he might have his field of fire.

When we have got some five hundred yards from our fire-trench and are about five hundred from the Herten, the officers show the men the tape that marks the new trench to be dug, and say, "Get a move on, lads." And do they get a move on? They do. Pick, shovel, and axe go nineteen strokes to the dozen: it is so much serener to be three foot down than on the surface of No-Man's Land. Were they working ten miles behind the line, they would require much more encouragement to get a move on. They would grouse. But in No-Man's Land they itch for the word to get started. And in three-quarters of an hour they are three foot down and still going strong. Once you are three foot down you can duck when the Boche sweeps No-Man's Land with his searchlight, and lo? there is not ein Englander in sight; the place is as empty as the wilderness of Sinai. His light veers away, and you carry on towards the security of four foot down.

Padre Quickshaw, whose presence in this fatigue is somewhat difficult to explain, is digging with the best. One suspects that he is out here because he wants to show the men that they can be sent to no danger which he will not share; but, as you value your feelings, don't say this aloud. It would make him tetchy indeed.

Tony stands above his platoon of diggers, thinking. He thinks: Funny to be standing at midnight exactly between England and Germany. As I look to the right I see the vaunted Hindenburg Line not five hundred yards away, all Verey lights and flashes and sparkle. On my left runs the British Line, much quieter, much less nervy. The former is now the hope and defence of Germany; the latter is now the threatening outwork of Britain. The vast sea of Germanism comes rolling

up and breaking into surf on this long Hindenburg Line here, and the tide of Britain beats grimly over there. It is something to stand on this narrow isthmus between the two and do some thinking. To stand on the half-way line before the two teams kick off and say to oneself, "What a dream!" He stoops down to gather a little sheaf of buttercups to send to Honor and Peggy.

A dangerous place to stand and dream? Incredibly less dangerous than it sounds; if your No-Man's Land is a thousand yards wide. Here are three companies working: and not a man has been hit yet. The searchlight surveys the scene again, and the men, if they have not had time to duck, stand perfectly still, though right in its beam—"Keep still! keep still, damn you!"—and to the German they look like stumps of trees or clumps of brush. The searchlight moves on; the machine-gun, spitting along its beam, has found no one. And how heavily are the odds weighted against a shell! Each is likely to kill a few hundred buttercups, but only one in fifty is likely to kill a man.

That first night in No-Man's Land Scrase leads back an unscathed company. Tony and Childe Harold, however, are bringing in a wounded man from Hughes Anson's company. It is just as dawn is greying the world; the covering parties have been called in, and the labourers are sneaking off, for their deeds are deeds of darkness and they fear the light. Tony and Childe Harold, walking at the tail-end of the men, as in single file they march crouching home, see a shadowy figure coming slowly towards them from the direction of the German line. They pause, and the company goes on.

"Who goes there? Who's that?" hisses Childe Harold.

There is no answer.

"Who are you?"

The figure replies that he is a man from one of A Company's covering parties.

"Well, why the devil didn't you say so at first?" demands Harold.

"Please sir, I'm hit," answers the man.

Harold apologizes uncomfortably. "Oh, sorry."

They go to him, and find him wounded in the stomach but able to walk. They assist him along, helping him over the fallen trunks and between the stumps. They get him to their own stretcher-bearers who are walking behind the company, and these men, though the day is lightening, stop and apply first field dressings to the wounded man. When his hat is

removed he is seen to be such an old boy with hair quite grey. He must be fifty; and a pathetic figure he looks, as he stands, confused by a touch of shell-shock, in No-Man's Land, which should be a Young Man's Land. Childe Harold is gentle with him: obviously the boy is sorry to have spoken roughly; sorry that he was trapped into scolding an old man thirty years his senior, who has been hit and is in pain.

Next time the machine-guns get them better. C Company loses six men wounded and one killed. The one killed is a boy that has been named here more than once, Dicky Roberts, the young brother of Fred. They bring his body to an Aid Post in the wood and lay it under a tree, covering face and form with a blanket. Tony sends for Fred; and Fred comes through the trees, ignorant of the calamity; but he meets Jim Stott and asks him, maybe suspecting something: "How's young Dicky? I was just coming to find him."

"You'll have a job to find him now, Freddy," Jim answers.

"Why, what do you mean? He ain't killed, is he?"

"Aye," says Jim.

Unable to say more, but anxious to sympathize, Jim falls in by his side and silently accompanies him to the Aid Post.

Tony leads them to the place where the dead boy lies under his blanket. Fred kneels down by his brother's head and lifts the blanket from the waxen, blood-stained face. Then he breathes out something between a sigh and a groan and covers his eyes with his hand and remains thus for a few minutes. Not till he has removed his hand does Jim Stott try again to offer a word of sympathy. He says:

"That's him reet enough, Freddy."

And Fred without taking his eyes from his brother's face answers:

"Yes."

"Aye, Freddy: it's him."

Nothing more is said. The sympathy of a good, inarticulate man has been offered and accepted.

To-morrow the machine-guns are more urgent than ever. Either they are suspicious that something is afoot in the darkness of No-Man's Land, or they know everything and, having tasted the blood of the 15th, are lusting for more. We can hardly

move to-night, for the searchlight traps us every minute. We seem always to be standing, motionless and breathless as statues, till it shall have turned its staring eye from our dark, petrified shapes. The searchlight is an aiming eye, and a machine-gun spits along its stare. Men fall; officers mutter oaths. An officer is hit somewhere, and, much faster than word of a mere private's fall, comes the news from man to man.

"Mr. Moulden's wounded, sir."

"God!"

"No, stay where you are, Tono." It is Scrase speaking. "I'll go. Look after these men——" and Kit disappears into the darkness; for Kit doesn't seem to know physical fear.

What is this? Tony is hating himself because his first response to the news of Moulden's wounding is an acute disappointment: now Moulden will leave the regiment for hospital and perhaps return no more; he won't be there to see the vindication of O'Grogan. There is no compassion for Moulden in this first reaction: only a compassion for himself; and something of jealousy too: this man, over whom he had planned to triumph, is winning honour and sympathy because he is the first officer to be hit.

"Is it serious?"

"No, sir. A wound in the thigh, it seems. They're getting 'im away all right."

Oh, good. Then perhaps he will come back to the battalion. He must. He *must* be there to see Tony's triumph. That triumph will be deflated of half its joy if Moulden isn't there to witness it.

Queer! His relief at hearing that the wound is not serious is as great as that sudden despair just now.

What more the substance of dream or fairy-tale than an enormous white château that stood among the trees behind the Boche line, a conspicuous object for miles around, suddenly disappearing in a cloud like the palace of Aladdin? That's just the sort of nonsense-thing that we expect to happen in this moonshine wood, and did happen the other day. Havrincourt Château stood white and stable behind the Boche line at nine minutes past seven one morning. There was a "bang" that shook the bole of every tree and drove the birds fluttering and

screaming into the sky, and lifted a thousand English faces above their parapet; and at ten minutes past seven the wood was still there, behind your Boche, but no château—only a cloud of smoke shaping itself and going down the wind. Men said in retrospect that we had long been tunnelling a sap beneath it and now at last had mined it sky-high; others that the enemy was using its cellars as an ammunition dump, and a lucky shot from our artillery in one moment discovered this interesting fact and gave it its term; but we do not really know. All we know is that it happened before our eyes—and that one day, hundreds of years hence, when this weary war is over, we shall wake up and wonder if it was true.

Or look at this village of Ytres, where we are back in reserve. Is it less of a mix-up than the wildest cucumber dream? Here's a French village with devil a Frenchman in it, and never a house that is not trying to stand on its head; a brick village that a children's party might have built on the garden lawns and knocked over in a communal temper. Here's abundant evidence of women and children—torn garments, broken toys, rusty cots and cradles—and all the women and children seem to have trooped away at the heels of some Pied Piper, and the flowers have entered into possession, as they might do in a fairy-tale of Grimm. The village is a mixture of ruins and flowers and English soldiers. You never saw such disorder and insubordination among flowers and weeds and grasses. All the cultured and genteel flowers, like children freed from restraint, are running riot with the common vulgar flowers. Jack's as good as his master, and the bluebell is hobnobbing with the iris; the wild rose is all cock-a-hoop, consorting as an equal with your peonies and garden roses; the wild poppies, red and pink, are pot-companions with the last of the tulips; and Columbine, the dancing girl, sits in the same lofty places as Mistress Dorothy Perkins. The grasses, meadow-sweets and all their impolite society are very high and mighty; and Daisy, the field wench, is damned if she'll curtsey to anyone. Discipline is gone with rejoicings, and there's a first-class Russian Revolution in the garden.

And the soldiers who wander and bivouac in the ruins have gone utterly "magnoon." Joe Wylie has formed a "Magnoon Band," where they all sit round in a semicircle, in the dust of a broken courtyard; and Joe, with a German helmet on his head, conducts them. An old perforated tin pail between the knees

of Art Webster is the kettle-drum; a cracked hogshead beaten at intervals by the same artist is the big drum; two rusty saucepan lids are the cymbals; an old stack-pipe is the trombone; and any old iron the triangle. Percussion outweighs the wind, but everywhere the *vox humana* hums through the teeth of the instrumentalists and helps matters out; and Joe Wylie is not above giving them a lift with his mouth-organ, even as he conducts them in "Yakka-hooley-hickey-doolah." He stands on a rusted tin strong-box (what treasured documents and what securities of the good *rentier* were not kept there once upon a time!); in front of him is an old music-stand (the discovery of which was the *fons et origo* of the band); the music is some yellowed French magazine; and religiously he turns over its pages as the symphony proceeds. "Casey Jones—Got another Daddy—Got another Daddy on the Cunard Line." Of course he out-Sousa's Sousa, till his helmet falls off his head and the band can't go on for laughing; nor he.

One day a few sad Frenchmen in black frock-coats and strange black hats come into this recently evacuated village and stroll among the ruins, saying, "It was here that I lived. *Diable*, here is one of my exercise books that I used when I was at the school. *Le pauvre Marcel*, he planted that rose tree, *et mon Hélène en était si fier. . . . Eh bien, que voulez vous; allons, venez, mes amis*, it is useless to stay here staring; but devil take it, I think my currants do not do well this year." They saunter towards the noise of the Regimental Magnoon Band as it plays in the sunlight that washes the cobbles of the estaminet's courtyard. They stare; and do not understand. The band is rendering a very sad air *con expressione*—with excessive *expressione* indeed; and the frock-coated Frenchmen, after watching, move away. "*Ah, ces Anglais! . . . La Guerre, n'est-ce donc pas serieux?* Is it not a matter of life and death for La Belle France, and for their England too? *Et ils la traitent toujours à la blague;* and their idea of joking is so bizarre; it is not gay. They fight well, certainly, but without the dignity of a great passion. As for patriotism, they seem not to understand what it means; they seem always to speak of their country more with bitterness than with love. *Nous autres Français*, we placard on our walls, '*On les aura!*' and '*Ils ne passeront pas!*' and our blood takes fire; but these English, they placard their walls too, but with what? With their ''Arf a mo', Kaiser!' and *que voulez vous*, they rest cold."

The band gives of its best to the Frenchmen, anxious to please ; it gives them " Fred Karno's Army " :

> " We are Fred Karno's Army,
> What bloody use are we ?
> We cannot fight, we cannot sing,
> We cannot do P.T.
> And when we get to Berlin
> The Kaiser he will say,
> Hoch, hoch, mein Gott,
> What a bloody fine lot
> Are the British Infantree ! "

And officers looking on ! *Mon Dieu !*

Such was the comment of France on England. Here is England's comment on her great ally, voiced by as good a nuncio of hers as you will find : Art Webster. Tony at this time is sent on a message to that part of the front where the English Right is in touch with the French Left ; and he takes Moulden's old batman, Webster, who is temporarily acting for him—Joe Wylie having gone back for a little while to the company cook-house : Joe is never averse to dodging the firing line with honour. In this sector there is a vast cemetery, one half of which is given to the English and the other to the French, and a pathway separates the two. The difference between the two halves is the difference between the two nations. The French crosses are beautifully cut ; they have gabled roofs (like the Germans') to protect them from the weather, and their inscriptions speak with love of the soldiers beneath and always contain the words *' Mort Glorieusement.'* The English crosses are as simple as the first on Calvary ; one bar of wood crossing another ; and their inscriptions, unless they are unofficial, seldom contain anything but the number, name and regiment of the dead man, and, forsooth, his religion, " C. of E.," " R.C.," " Wes.," as if that still mattered to him. Never is one seen that makes mention of glory. Tony and Art Webster are walking up the pathway, for there is to be a stirring ceremony among the French graves to-day. An eloquent *député* is coming to address the soldiers of the *armée*, as they parade beside their fallen brothers. Such things happen in the French sectors, for have not they among the nations best understood *moral ;* nay, invented it ? The *député* comes in his frock-coat, and a magnificent general in sky-blue and gold accompanies him ; the French troops are drawn up in front

of the orator, and the thousand French crosses seem arrayed at attention too; he draws from his breast-pocket the manuscript of his oration; he delivers it with immense verve and faultless elocution, his spare hand constantly pointing to the paraded dead. His excitement increases, his eyes fill with tears, his hand waves more furiously; the soldiers, listening, call out endorsements and deep bravoes, while their eyes moisten. Tony and the single English tommy standing at his side begin to feel uncomfortable. The orator works up to his peroration; he reaches it with a fine crescendo; he has done; he thrusts the manuscript back into his breast, and embraces the general, placing a kiss on both his cheeks. Tony hears one comment from Art Webster: "Oh my Gawd!"

The performances of Hughes Anson are not irrelevant here. The Roseate Hughes had not long savoured the atmosphere of the trenches so like to Gallipoli before he fell again into his old bad habits, and after killing the bottles of whisky at night and making merry with his friends, would aver that the evening could only be fittingly closed by a visit with a bomb in each hand to the trenches of Brother Boche. "Yes, better have a dekko at his trenches," he would say. "We don't know what games he may be up to. Better go and see. Who's coming! You, George? Come along; it's a good war."

His friends declining to partner him, he would sally forth into No-Man's Land alone, stagger in a somewhat zigzag route across its wide desolation, throw his bombs over the German wire, and return to his own parapet, singing a merry snatch the while. To Tony's alarm, he loomed up one night, on his return from such an unauthorized visit, in front of Tony's traverse; and very red, shining and happy he looked, though unsteady, as he loudly chanted: "*Where* did that one go to, 'Erbert? *Where* did that one go? . . . Where the—how the —who the—what the—*where* did that one go? . . . Hallo, Bungay! It's a good war."

The men laughed at him, and admired: but Authority got word of it, and cautioned him. A bottle of whisky some nights later drowned this caution, and all other forms of caution too; and Rosy was out again in No-Man's Land, getting on with the war. Who may have testified against him will never be known now, but next morning Rosy found himself under arrest, for attacking the enemy without orders, for unnecessarily endangering the life of an officer, for risking the capture

by the enemy of his person and valuable information therewith, and for dear knows what else. He spent the succeeding days in a hut, without his belt and under the charge of a delighted Childe Harold, who reported to the brotherhood of C Company that Rosy spent all day with the Manual of Military Law on the table before him and a damp towel round his head, studying, studying, studying, and anon pacing up and down as he conned large sections of it by heart, and then inviting the Childe to hear him his lesson. Rosy had been a lawyer, we remember, before he went in for the jollier business of Advertising, and then for the still jollier business of War, and he had little doubt that he would be a match for the red and gilded old Colonel and the junior officers, mere amateurs both in soldiering and law, who would sit on his body in judgment.

"I've got 'em! Harry my Childe!" he would say to his jailer, after spouting verbatim a section of the Army Act. "I've got 'em *there!*" and he turned down a spatulate thumb to signify the position of the Colonel and his subordinates. "*That'll* see 'em right in the soup. 'Struth! it's fun. Damme, Harold, I'm looking forward to this. Allah is just."

In due time he was up before his Court-Martial, and it was "But how, sir, does your contention stand in the face of Chapter Six, Paragraphs Fifty-eight to Seventy-one, Pages Seventy-one to Seventy-three of the Manual of Military Law?" and "But if you will excuse me, sir, it says in R.P. One hundred and eight, M.M.L., Page Six hundred and thirty-two, and in the corresponding section of the Army Act; and again, I think you will find, in M.M.L., Chapter Seven, Paragraphs Thirty to Forty, Pages Sixty-three to Sixty-four?" and he was reciting a long passage to a bench of troubled and bewildered men. If they disallowed this recitation, he had another in pickle for them, equally long and unintelligible at first hearing, whereby they were totally disabled for a while; and, in short, he was acquitted by some good honest men who fully believed that the British Courts-Martial were the fairest in the world, and that, if there was any doubt about the prisoner's guilt (as no one was prepared, in this case and by this time, to deny) he must be given the benefit of it.

He left the court as rosily smiling as when he reappeared from his solitary raids; and he received the felicitations of his brother officers, including Colonel Tappiter, whose words were: "You've got off this time, Anson, and I accordingly

congratulate you, but let me assure you there'll be a conviction next time, Manual of Military Law or no Manual of Military Law. I'll see to it myself. It's quite possible for me to pull all sorts of strings behind the scenes. I hope you clearly understand that."

"Perfectly, sir; thank you," said Rosy, and soon after that there was no need for him to attack the enemy without orders. The orders came.

Tony to Honor, at the close of a letter:

"We are in process of moving from one sector of the front to another, and I am writing this in the ruins of a famous little village that figured largely in recent battles. This time three years ago it must have been perfectly lovely. Although it is laid now in brick-dust, it is still beautiful for its wild, overgrown flower-gardens. Looking out of the door of the shanty in which I am sitting, I can see growing among the weeds and grasses and beneath the ruined walls bluebells, primroses, forget-me-nots, buttercups, dandelions, purple and yellow pansies, foxgloves and hundreds of other flowers whose names I don't know. Recumbent among the weeds are the fruit trees deliberately cut down by the Hun, and they are blossoming for the last time by reason of the sap that is in them. At mess last night we had in the centre of the table a broken jar chock-full of pansies. Where are your letters? Remember you cannot write too often nor too long When I find myself on the last page of your letters I feel unhappy. to think I am coming to their end. I slow up to make them last longer. And after I have turned in sometimes and am beneath my blankets, I read them through again before going to sleep so as to have pleasant dreams.

"But enough of this nonsense. Herewith three absurd little buttercups which really did in their lifetime have all Germany arrayed on one side of them and all Britain on the other.

"Well, well. I've reached the bottom of page ten, so it's time to ring off. Chin chin. . . . Oh, just a minute, I forgot something. Much love. Thank you, that's all. Ring off. Yours always—always."

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS THE BATTLE

THEIR movement from the sunny places of the southern front towards the north was neither direct nor speedy. With the rest of the Division they were first concentrated in some of the back parlours behind Britain's big shop-window frontage from St. Quentin to the sea; and here they were refurbished, reinforced and reconditioned. Then they were moved to store-rooms further north and put to drill and practices as simple as those of their first training in England. They learned again to form fours; they charged again with fixed bayonets at dummy enemies swinging from gallows; they practised shooting at the butts; they practised the capture of trenches in a field of daisies. And all the time they were given good food, good games, good concert parties, and good leave. Thus they were refreshed and fattened up for slaughter.

They heard the Bayonet Lecturer.

Yes, in these days, the voice of the Bayonet Lecturer was loud in the land. The appearance of the famous Bayonet Lecturer, in the second half of the great war, was a most significant development. Tony could not determine whether this horrid portent did more to ratify or to undermine his belief in the sterling humour of common England. High Authority, it seemed, had decided by this time that the war against a scientifically dour and scientifically remorseless foe could not be won by an army which, while willing to fight as gallantly as most, declined to hate; it made the remarkable discovery that organized hate could only be beaten by organized hate; that frightfulness, though it might be disconcerted by a barrage of laughter, could not be downed and overridden by it, but must be answered by a like frightfulness; and over this interesting discovery (to Tony's thinking) they fairly went

"magnoon." They ordained that frightfulness must be inculcated in the Lancashire mill hands, the Glasgow stevedores, the London costers, the English Public Schoolboys and other sportsmen who made up the British Army. Only it must not be called "frightfulness" when postulated of the British, but "The Offensive Spirit." So these gentlemen, the Bayonet Lecturers—gifted orators all and selected for their platform virtuosity—were sent from unit to unit to deliver the goods; to preach, that is, the new Gospel of the Offensive Spirit. And deliver the goods they did; whether the goods were taken indoors or left on the sill is another matter.

The most celebrated of them, who shall be nameless here, was described as "worth another army corps" by a High General who was even more gurglingly elated than most with the new gospel; and he was certainly a remarkable performer on the boards; the 15th were lucky to get him for their visitation.

The question for Tony was: did the sending out of these Apostles provide one more assurance that England's humour was collapsing beneath the storm, or was it perhaps the greatest tribute that had yet been paid to the unconquerable good nature of her army as a whole? If this organized and rather desperate attempt to change the nature of the army from St. Quentin to the sea was deemed necessary, what better proof could you have of the strength and the universality of that nature? Splendid! He plumped for this latter reading, and the thought gave him much glee. He decided that, although the humour of the English was wilting a little under the hurricane—here a branch and there a branch (especially some of the topmost branches)—in root and trunk it stood stolid and unshakable as ever. And it would endure; nay, more, it would be a winning factor, *pace* my masters, the Staff. Why? Because from frightfulness and passion the pendulum could swing only to despair and possibly mutiny; whereas from a grim, grumbling, grinning endurance it would swing to—a grim, grumbling, grinning endurance. As he had always foreseen, the best-natured army would win.

So it was with more glee than disgust that he went with the rest of the battalion to sit at the feet of the Chief of the Apostles. Literally they sat at his feet. They were all massed into a large barn and given the order "Sit!" and, as there were no benches, they sank tailorwise to the floor, facing a stage erected

by a concert party, the illustrious "Th'Lads" of the 42nd (East Lancashire) Division. On to these boards stepped Demosthenes (Acting Major) to deliver his Philippic. His very first words showed that his entertainment was going to be as rich as any given by "Th'Lads," splendid though these Lancashire comedians were. If ever there was a master of crowd psychology who knew what was the sure "stage laugh," it was the Major now standing or dancing before them.

Listen:

"When you are rushing towards the Boche with your bayonets, boys, and he throws up his hands and says, 'Kamerad! Kamerad! I'm the father of five children,' kill him; *kill* him, or he may be the father of five more." (Loud laughter.) "Yes, you take it from me, lads, there's only one good Boche—oh yes, there's *one* good Boche, there's *one*—just *one*—and that's a dead Boche." (Loud laughter.) "You see, it's no good feeling meek and Christian when you've got the bayonet in your hands and are going to stick it into the gizzard of a Hun, which unfortunately (as I grant you, I grant you) is not at all a Sunday school performance. You're going to draw blood, and you've got to feel blood-thirsty about it. Now, I've no particular use for swearing, but I think there's a case for it when you're advancing to the attack; it gets you into the real offensive spirit. It is no good running across No-Man's Land behind your bayonet and mumbling 'God forgive me' or 'For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.'" (Loud laughter.) "No, boys, grip your rifle, *so*—as if you meant it—set your teeth, *so*, and charge across No-Man's Land, hissing through them"—and he acted the part, running the breadth of the stage, his hand gripping an imaginary rifle, and his lips moving over clenched teeth in unheard oaths. Luckily the favourite oaths of the British soldier mostly began with labial consonants and so could be at once recognized by lip-readers; and the Royal West Essex roared as it recognized its old friends. Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on. The Major charged back and forth across the stage, saying nothing and saying everything. Gad, it was rich. Tony heard Scrase gulp.

Flushed with his success, he pursued: "I was once demonstrating this to a meek little bespectacled man, who was probably a Sunday school teacher at home; indeed, I think that in

civilian life he was ' Queenie ' of *Home Notes* "—(Loud laughter from the tommies, who did not read *Punch*)—" and when I had finished, I asked him to do it for me himself—and this is how he did it "—and the Major gave an impersonation of a timid, peering little man, not too sound at his knees, stumbling among the shell-holes, with bayonet fixed and lips muttering in a gentle but determined " B—— h——! B—— h——! B—— h——! " It brought down the house.

" Not that I'm scoffing——" began the Major, but he couldn't proceed, for the applause broke out again. He smiled his acknowledgment.

" Not that I'm scoffing at religion," he continued, when the noise had subsided. " I want to say here and now that I'm on the side of the padres in this war, every time. I don't see how you can get through this hell-upon-earth without some sort of religion, and perhaps I may be permitted to tell you that I go to my Holy Communion every Sunday morning——"

Tony turned towards Scrase to see how he would take this, and he saw Kit's eyebrows lift. He looked round upon the men, but he saw no repulsion there; the men were lost in admiration of the orator's powers. He understood. The least introspective soldiers in the world, they knew nothing of their own natures, nor suspected that the oration was a crime against themselves, knifing their noblest quality; the crudest of critics, they did not doubt that the religious peroration on which the Major had now embarked was very fine indeed.

" When this odious task is done," he concluded, " and done manfully, I feel that we shall see again the finger of God pointing to the Manger at Bethlehem."

And he turned about, signifying that he had finished.

They gave him an ovation that shook the walls and the roof; and when he could be heard again, he replied: " I don't want you to applaud me, boys. The only thanks I want is the assurance that when next you have to go over the top, you will prove ' shock troops ' in every sense of the word. Remember, if you have to attack, well, by God, *attack*; and for your purposes then, my text is the truth: ' The only good Boche is a dead Boche.' Good-bye and God bless you."

As the men filed out Tony kept near his own C Company officers to hear their comments. Scrase's was simple.

" Oh my God! " he said.

"Another powerful article by Mr. Bottomley next week," said Aylwin.

"Yes," agreed Tony. "I feel I shall report sick to-night."

"Oh no; 'medicine and duty' as usual," sighed Scrase.

"Well, I think it was a damn fine effort," Childe Harold asserted. "I haven't laughed so much for ages."

And all that evening C Company was in debate.

"I think we'd better resign," suggested Scrase, who was sufficiently distressed to reveal some of his true thoughts. "It's not the fact that one fire-eating Major poured out a lot of blood and iron that worries me: one can hear the same sort of thing any day in any club in Pall Mall—only less well done; and the Alderman, my father, is no bad hand at it"—Kit often spoke with playful affection of "The Alderman my father"—"but it's the fact that the men applauded."

"Well, I think it was damn fine," said the Childe.

"I suppose you could argue," Aylwin suggested, "that the war's got to be won, and, if that can only be done by us all becoming Huns for a year or two, well, let's get on with it."

"*Pre*-cisely," said the Childe. "Sound sense."

"Oh, you bloody little fool!" snapped the irritated Scrase. "Can't you see that if you defeat the material forces of the Hun and at the same time let his spiritual ideas triumph, you're really beaten?"

"Maybe, but I consider it was a damn fine speech," said the Childe.

"No, you're getting it all wrong, Kit, old man," said Tony. "You're as wrong in your way as the Staff are in theirs. In fact, *I'm* the only person who understands the war and the men. The Staff are absolutely wrong because they're too dull to see that the very thing they want to change—I mean, the imperturbability of the men—is a winning factor; and *you're* all wrong because you're deducing too much from the men's applause. Of course they clapped and shouted for more. Why? Just because he made 'em laugh. And since they don't know the first thing about themselves, they had no reason to suppose they didn't agree. But will it make *that* much difference to them?" He snapped a finger and thumb. "Not it! It's water on a duck's back. You'll see: if they have to take prisoners to-morrow, they'll give 'em their fags just the same. In fact, I believe you could show that their laughter was evidence, really, not of their agreement, but of

the very opposite—of their unconquerable easy-going good nature which, in the long run, will prove an antiseptic against all that poison."

"Bosh!" retorted Scrase, too angry to reason clearly. "The very fact that they're in the war at all is the denial of their humour. War is the bankruptcy of humour."

"Perhaps, perhaps," admitted Tony after thought. "But they're paying more in the pound than anyone else. And they'll go on doing it. They will; because they're incurable. One speech can't undo what they've been learning all their lives at Stamford Bridge or wherever it is they waste their Saturday afternoons watching a footer match—I mean, not to kick a man when he's down. I was once watching one of our soccer games in Sinai—against the 54th, I fancy—and next to me was Fred Roberts; and, as far as I can remember, Fred spoke only one word all he time. It was 'Dirty!' He pronounced it 'Dir'y!' He never uttered a word of praise throughout the whole game, but when one of the players (whether on our side or on the other, mind you) tripped an opponent, he just murmured 'Dir'y!' and when a couple of fellows kicked each other—quite accidentally—he said 'Dir'y!' and when the referee gave a doubtful decision (though it was in favour of his own side, I think) he said, 'Oh, dir'y!' and when one of the 54th was hurt and writhing a bit, though no one knew how it had happened, he called out 'Dir'y! Dir'y!'"

Tony's story was much enjoyed, and above the laughter he contended that Fred's "Dir'y!" was much nearer the truth of the men than all the applause they had raised that day.

"Well, I hope so," said Scrase. "I've been in two minds about forming up the company, telling them that they've listened to a lot of tripe this afternoon, begging them not to do anything they were told, and then handing myself over to be shot."

"Oh, don't do that," said Tony. "Don't be shot. I'm perfectly right in what I say. You'll see. You'll see when the time comes."

For a short period they were in the Line again, having taken over from a regular Division which was going north to the

Salient. When themselves should be relieved, it would be their turn to move by easy stages to the north. Again it was a quiet sector, its rate of mortality a death a day. The chief activity was in the air. The kite balloons, shaped like sausages, hung aloft at regular intervals behind the British front, and a similar chain of German balloons dotted the clear sky over the enemy country. In front of both these arrays aeroplanes patrolled to guard them from the waspish assassins from over the way. Because it was the local game, in these parts, for a midge-like aeroplane to come suddenly—swiftly—out of the blue and bear down upon an enemy balloon, as it hung there captive and helpless; to set fire to it, and race home again. And besides these visitors—sudden, swift, and nervy—there were the cold-blooded groups of photographing and observing aeroplanes, often eight or nine in number, which sailed with damnable calmness over the hostile territory, and took their notes, and, turning about in an elegant manœuvre, plied back to their aerodromes, no more excitedly. Then the late summer sky would be spotted with the white puffs of British shrapnel or the black puffs of German high-explosive. One day a German machine was successfully forced down within the British lines. Its pilot descended gracefully; got out; set fire to his machine; lit up a cigarette and waited for an escort to take him prisoner.

Another evening—it was about six o'clock—his brother came out of the blue and, humming over the 15th trenches, made for the nearest balloon at a speed so tearing, and in a loneliness so splendid and pitiable, that the men of Essex below him could but wish him every success. In defiance of a well-known order, six hundred heads swung back to watch him; and had he cared to look down he might have seen the whole British line illuminated for him with white faces—two of which, in a trench bay, were the faces of Corporal J. Stott and Fred Roberts. But he was in a great haste up there, and probably his eyes were busied with events on his own level, rather than with those on the world beneath. For every aircraft gun which could reach his field of heaven was playing about him now. Innumerable white flakes of shrapnel danced in pairs before him; black flakes of H.E. joined their company and gambolled on their own like friendless black sheep in a flock; and soon a whole scarf of sky was as spotted as the skin of a leopard. With trick after trick, feint after feint,

he tried to get through this curtain of fire: he dipped, but the curtain fell before him; he beat up higher, and the curtain followed him there.

Now whether it was the natural instinct of Fred Roberts and his kind for grumbling against their own side, or whether it was their detached interest, as sportsmen, in the pluck of another sportsman who was fighting against odds—whichever it may have been, and one inclines to the latter explanation—they seemed often to forget that the aeroplane was German, and the shrapnel puffs British—aye, and the silly sausage-balloons British too—and they would give the best part of their applause to the lonely little midge of an aviator, so daringly singeing the eyebrows of his foes.

"Gaw! 'e's got some pluck, ain't 'e?" said Fred Roberts. "*Thet's* the spirit! 'E'll do 'em! 'E'll do 'em in—you mark me words."

"'Appen he'll be hit first," suggested Jim Stott, more from a desire to provoke Roberts than from any ill will to the aeroplane.

"'*It* 'im? '*It* 'im?" scoffed Fred. "Them archies never 'it anyone yet. Remember old Fritz in Sinai? Never got within a mile of 'im, they never. Their shootin's no ruddy good. Never 'as bin."

"Ah've seed better," Jim admitted.

"Yur—it was a walk-over for 'im."

"Bah goom! he's through!" shouted Corporal Stott. "Aye, he is—he is and all. Goom, he's a champion lad."

"I told yer so!" shouted Fred, delighted. "Blimey, he's done 'em in properly."

"Noah, but he ain't, Fred. He's turned aboot."

He had: there was no doubt of it; so Fred took comfort in the words:

"Ah, but he'll do 'em in yet. You see!"

The aeroplane was now flying parallel with the shrapnel curtain, as if seeking a hole in it.

"Ah reckon he's looking for his chance. He woan't give in, in a hurry."

"*Course* not!" Fred instantly agreed.

"Ah must say Ah hope they doan't get him."

"*They'll* never get him. Not on your life!"

That moment the aviator executed a marvellous feint: he pitched nose-first, as though hit, and shot towards the earth,

spinning as he fell, but just as all were shouting that he was done for, he righted, hared *under* the curtain, and in a few seconds was behind it, racing for the balloon. Gorgeous! How could the ranks of Tuscany forbear to cheer? Their eyes swung towards the threatened balloon, which up till now (so it seemed) had sat stupidly on the top of its cable watching these events so personal to itself. It was rapidly descending.

"Crums!" Fred Roberts pointed to it and laughed almost gloatingly. "*'E's* got the wind up—good and proper. *'E's* for 'ome all right."

A tiny little yellow umbrella with a dangling tassel opened to leeward of the balloon; and another; it was the observers who had leapt out in their parachutes, and were floating to earth, swayed to and fro by the wind.

"Here they coom!" cried Jim Stott. "Here they coom! Non-stop to t'ground! See 'em, choom?" A whole trench system was laughing its amusement at their discomfiture. "Eh, but yon lads weren't havin' any. It's their dinner time, tha knows. . . ." Jim watched them happily, and then laughed still more at the humour of their alarm. "They're main short o' breath just now, Ah reckon."

The aeroplane abandoned this balloon, which seemed to have escaped it, and turned towards its neighbour; but by now the shrapnel curtain was in front of it again; and of a truth it seemed to the watchers below that the aeroplane, tired of this opposition, deliberately fought a way through the bursting shells, winding in and out among them—like a Rugby three-quarters with the ball in his hands, worming, feinting and dodging through the opposing forwards and backs. An inspiring sight; and Fred Roberts and Jim Stott shouted their encouragement.

"Thet's the style! Go it, chum!"

"Shoov 'em off, lad! Give 'em summat to think aboot. Eh, there's a try coomin' for Owdham now!"

"They're pullin' the other balloon dahn, see? Bet the observer's sweatin' 'is guts out."

"Aye, t'oother sausage has got t'belly-ache now. See, lad? t'oother's coomin' down."

"Yah! They ain't 'arf windy, are they? 'Ere are the perra-shoots. Two more for 'ome!"

The aeroplane was through again, and, like a released bird, it flew at a hundred miles an hour towards the nearest stationary

balloon. But this was only a feint to suggest a false security to the one on which its eye was really cocked; it sharply banked and curved round, and, increasing its speed, swooped down upon the real prey. The observer—there was only one—in this second balloon stayed almost too long. The deadly aeroplane appeared to be above him before the watchers saw that his parachute was clear of the basket and sinking through the air. Now an edge of orange flame outlined the top of the balloon and burst into a column of flame, which quickly shrouded itself in a cloud of smoke; and the burning gas-bag began to drop like a stone. All held their breath as they thought the falling conflagration must envelop the tiny yellow parachute with its hanging atom of humanity, and frizzle it to nothing. But—ah, thank God!—it fell to the side of it, and in a second all that was left of the battle was a tenuous black cloud in the sky with a long smoking line reaching down to the earth; a tiny yellow umbrella swinging and swaying in the wind; and an enemy aeroplane diminishing, fast as thought, into the distant sky.

"'E's going back for his Iron Cross," said Fred Roberts.

"And Ah reckon he deserves it too," said Jim Stott.

"'E ain't waitin' to stay for supper, is he?"

"Noah, but Ah reckon he'll be havin' a sup o' summat good to his dinner to-neet."

"A rare plucky feller, that."

"Aye, and did tha see as how he never fired at t'lads in t'parachutes?"

"Nah; proper sportsman, *'e* is."

CHAPTER IV

A GLIMPSE OF HONOR

THEY were back in rest for a few days; their billets most comfortable—a flock of Armstrong and Nissen huts in a meadow. Passing the Orderly Room Hut one evening, Tony saw a rolled valise and a stuffed kit-bag resting on the ground outside, with a soiled trench-coat tossed astride them. Near-by stood Art Webster biting at one of his fingers. Some new arrival, undoubtedly; and Tony, not incurious, sent a sidelong glance into the darkness of the Orderly Room. He halted. He had seen the back of an officer who was reporting to the Adjutant there, and thought he recognized it. A quick glance at the names painted on valise and kit-bag—and he read "Lieut. A. Moulden, 1/15 R.W.E."

"Yuss. Mr. Moulden's back, sir," said Art Webster.

Tony's heart leapt with satisfaction.

Leave was freely granted in these last weeks before the north claimed them; and they called it their "good-bye leave." Tony did not doubt nor linger this time; he would take his look at Honor and all whom he loved, and give them a kiss, in case—but he hardly formulated the rest of the thought. True, some of the officers and men who had been on leave said, "Don't go. Let it alone. Don't touch it;" and when asked what they meant, declared with obvious sincerity that the contrasts were too awful—the contrast between the restless, crowded but lonely life of the front and the lazy, loving, lionizing atmosphere of a Ten-days' Leave—the contrast between ten days' laziness, ten days' love, ten days' lionizing, ten days' being the centre of a circle instead of a lonely spot on the circumference—and then the return! No, it was too unsettling. Art Webster, on his return from Thamesmouth, expressed this in his own way to Tony: "If you was to give me ten pounds, sir, I wouldn't go on leave again. The leave's all right, but

it's the coming back. My missus 'ung around me neck—sort of hysterical—and begged me to go sick or git wounded or git discharged with ignominy—anything so that I went back and stayed at home. 'Tain't good enough, sir." And another time Tony met Hughes Anson as he arrived back from what he had described before leaving as "a honeymoon in Cornwall with his wife." Tony had never seen the rosy face of Hughes so empty of liveliness. Hughes pitched down his valise in front of his hut, and tossed his pack after it, and said nothing.

"Well, how goes it, Rosy?" asked Tony.

"Rotten," was all that Hughes said, nor had he humour enough to make a grimace.

"I suppose it *is* rather beastly coming back," Tony sympathized. "But they all say it's not so bad once you've got back and are in the old rut again. After a week you feel quite in the swim again."

"That may be," said Hughes, unsmiling. "But I'm still coming back."

Tony went of course. They put his warrant into his hand; and he was off to the Railhead, with a pack on his back and a palpitation in his heart. The leave train was no mere joggling chain of coaches with half their windows broken: it was a stretch of time bespangled by an enchanter's beam; the leave-boat was an interval in time, a thrilled suspense, separating one tract from another, like the break in the land where the grey September Channel rolled between the heights of Boulogne and the Folkestone cliffs. And then Folkestone itself, and the green downs, and the London train lying asleep along the quay—the London train! was it possible?—You bowed old porters with your kindly, comic faces, well met, well met indeed; we know your meaning now, for your brothers and your children over there have taught it us. A bustling on the jetty, but without haste or excitement—not the bustle of the Boulogne quays—and at last the train moved, and either window looked out on England—England so quiet and so green-hilled, her blue mists hanging in the thickets like wood-fire smoke, and her oaks and beeches and elms, her limes and ashes and chestnuts, all dressing themselves for autumn, in her own slow, hasteless way. Was ever a country of pattern so miniature and with trees so many and varied? Here she lay, behind her long wall building at Passchendaele, whose

khaki was a brown from her own meadows, and in its vagueness and its quietness so like to her! O little land—but no more, no more! let this subaltern's tears pass unrecorded; it is a story that was told not once nor twice, in those old and faded days.

And England soon passed from his gaze, for Honor had the whole of his mind. No groom, as his wedding-day drew towards evening, trembled with love of his bride as Tony now for the girl who was his wife. How could he ever have doubted his love when he could return like this to her with a hunger so overwhelming and so suffused with tenderness? No other woman in the world did he want. Jill? He had wondered once if Jill could have given him more than Honor, but somehow this afternoon he wasn't loving Jill as he was loving Honor; not in the same way. Honor was drawing him as if she was the only lodestone anywhere; and it was less her youth and beauty which gave her this power than the fact that she was *his*. His wife, and belonging to him! He was supremely happy as the train bore him to Honor. No shadowy fear, coming out of the future from its seat at Passchendaele, could find standing-room in his heart: as a man in the grip of a passion stays not to reck of consequences, so Tony this evening could see nothing, and cared to see nothing, beyond the welcoming arms of Honor.

In their betrothal days, when she would meet him at Victoria Station, his term of schoolmastering over, she was wont to dissolve that considerable structure and all its population with her kiss; and this evening, when he saw her a-tiptoe behind the waiting crowd, it was just as of old. The soldiers and the civilians on the platform, the policemen at the gates, the Y.M.C.A. officers and the V.A.D.s, the arc-lamps and the steam and the racket, all perished out of sight and hearing; they ceased to exist or have any meaning as her arms drew him against her and her lips, after murmuring, "Tony, darling! . . ." pressed themselves on his.

He held her by the shoulders away from him, for it was his humour to study her and learn her looks afresh; and she gazed up at him, smiling at this humour, and deprecating it, and happy beneath it. He pressed those wide little shoulders between his fingers that he might know them again and possess them; for had he not, years ago, begun by falling in love with her shoulders? Six years ago, and did she look older? Hardly a day: what a child she seemed! And she had taken

great pains with herself to-day: those marcel-waves in her gold-shot hair were put there for *him*, and that powder giving a peach-bloom to her skin, and that touch of rose—done in secret and ashamedly, no doubt—on her full, round cheeks. He smiled down at her, lest he wept.

In the taxi which bore them through the unlighted streets, they held each other's hands or suddenly hugged each other again, like a vulgar couple; not speaking much, because all their talk, unless it was the absurd whispers of love, seemed perfunctory and unreal. At the Daubenys' home there was a mighty to-do of welcome, Mrs. Daubeny and his mother and Joyce, with little Antony Leonard much grown, and Peggy with little Michael Derek also unrecognizable, and the two maids, all performing in the drawing-room; but it escaped him somehow; he could not appreciate it or realize it, for Honor and his thoughts of her got in the way; he and she must reach the climax of their reunion, and melt into one another, before anything else could become real. And that night, when darkness shut out all the world, and nothing lived for them, nor was—neither the familiar furniture in the room nor the large guns belching fire towards Passchendaele—and when they indeed seemed to melt into one another, and he, with his lips on her disordered hair, muttered tendernesses inexpressible: "You are the only thing that matters to me; nothing, nothing else matters," then Tony knew a supreme moment of his life, and a thought flashed: "If ever I am tempted to doubt my love again, I shall remember this, and what is possible between her and me;" and another: "I have known the best of life; if I have to die, I shall think of this as I go, and will not rebel."

Of course this perfection did not last; it can only live when the world is shut out. Three days, four days, and he got used to being on leave and walking the London pavements and living as a married man with a sprightly wife at his side; and there were times when he would be impatient with her. Her mind was so impervious to his new ideas; it was the mind of the excellent Major-General her father, only where the General would fire up in resistance to Tony's wilder theories she would just frown over them and be confused. Here they were, late

in 1917, and she was still hating the Germans—even hating them more volubly than in the first days of August, 1914. Her hardness towards the enemy repelled him with a deeper wound than any the enemy were likely to give him; for it was a wound of the heart. When he irritably protested, "In the trenches we abandoned all that bunk after the first month or two," she got quite flushed and angry and said, "Well, why go on with it; why not come home and be a conchy?" and he could not attempt to explain why, because he knew it was not in her to understand. Instead he exasperated her further by suggesting that the conscientious objectors must be heroic fellows; at which her brow knit with petulance, till laughter unstrung it, and she said, "You're just trying to make me angry, and I've determined not to be rude to you once during your leave, so it simply can't be done, darling."

Her manifest inability to feel the war in all its magnitude appalled him too. She thought she felt it, and loudly, even merrily, protested that she did; but she didn't really. He had imagined that the world had but one centre now, to which all eyes looked—the war; but Honor was still moving in her own little world of which herself was the centre; the war shadowed it, but did no more.

And another thing hurt him: wonderful as had been her abandonment to him on the night of his home-coming, she had really but little understanding of the part she might play towards a husband who had come back to her with a mind tired and bruised out of thought, and a desire only to take for a while the strange solace of a woman's body. Perhaps she had been inspired beyond herself that night: afterwards he perceived that she would submit herself dutifully rather than give herself understandingly; and his heart nearly died within him.

He told her nothing of the horrors of the trenches, but only of their laughter. He said no word of Passchendaele.

So there came his hour of treachery to her. Ten days is a very short time, but it was time for his loyalty to droop for an hour. The fifth day was here, and Jill was coming post-haste from a hospital in the Midlands, with three days' leave. Would he feel of Jill, whose mind had always been larger than her little sister's, and who once had surely trembled on the brink of love for him, that she could have given him all he wanted, had she, and not Honor, been his wife? He would have long glorious talks with her, as in the old days, and all the time he

would be feeling for his answer. This thought was very pleasant and filled him with excitement; and that was his treachery—a treachery of the mind, and nothing more; but he thought it a terrible thing, after the wonder of his love for Honor a few days before.

Jill came radiant with delight to see him again, and to hold his hand in both of hers, and to blush when he insisted on a brotherly kiss; but though there went out from him all that abounding love which a man can feel for the woman he is not in love with, he was aware of a sharp joy and relief to see that she now looked much older than Honor, and was not so beautiful. And, falling into the old long earnest talks, he discovered in her a vindictiveness against the Germans hardly less distressing than Honor's, and he thanked God! Nor could he distil out of her any sympathy for the conchies, and he thanked God again.

There was only one who understood him—Peggy.

Happiness and content returned to him. He went out and walked along that road by the river where in his youth he used to hang about for Honor to come down her steps; and there he examined the pain which had just visited him and was now gone. "I have been through all this before," he told himself; "and I resigned myself to loneliness; and in loneliness I went away, only to find that I wanted Honor more than anyone else, with or without the perfect thing I had dreamed of. I will not go through that cycle again. It is a drop-back into those infantilist personal cravings, out of which I resolved to escape into something more adult. *Peste!* Here have I been railing at Honor for self-centredness; and the very disappointment which provoked my irritability was the disappointment of a purely self-centred creature—one who could not lift his love out of a child's *getting* into a grown man's *giving*. My love for Honor cannot be less than its topmost pitch, and I touched that six days' ago, and it was good enough for any man."

The seventh day passed, and the eighth; and how could a disloyalty endure when the moment of separation was bearing down upon them so dourly, and the shadow of Passchendaele darkened? Death, coming close, can be a great life-giver; and, as the spontaneous gaiety of the first days merged into the false gaiety of the last, Honor was inspired beyond herself again, and, speaking nothing of her inner thoughts, only loved him with the art and the passion of cleverer women, filling him with happiness, and with laughter at yesterday's doubts.

Victoria Station was about them again. "Good-bye, darling."

"O Tony, Tony. . . ."

"That's all right, dearest. Everything'll be all right."

"O Tony. . . ."

"Good-bye, my love. I love you better than anything else in the world."

"And I you. . . ."

At Etaples in the great Rest Camp he learned that his Brigade was marching north.

It was next morning that they told him this; and with a morsel of information so high-seasoned he hurried back to the Officers' Lines to share it with his temporary batman. This was none other than "Little Willie" Sparrow, whom he had discovered on the boat, somewhere between Folkestone and Boulogne. Willie, though a year older now and of full military age, seemed no different from the boy who had come to take his leave of Lieut. O'Grogan at Hill 40 in Sinai. Slender and beardless, he was of the type that must always look less than his age. He was plumper in the face no doubt—his excellent mother would have seen to that—but one might still have written him down as sixteen, and not written oneself a fool. When Tony came up to him on the deck of the boat with a "*Saïda*, Willie," the lad had shown an unaffected delight in the meeting, and was soon pouring out an explanation of his presence in a draft for France. He had long been uneasy, he said, about his departure from the good old battalion, and when he heard that they had arrived in France he became more and more impatient to return to them.

"It's funny, isn't it, sir, how quickly you forget all the bad times and remember only the good ones, and how, after a few months in civvies and out of it all, you become restless to get back. It's nothing to do with heroism, I don't think, do you, sir?—I'm not even sure that it's altogether healthy; but there the fact is; if you've had two years of the war, you can't stand many months away from it; you begin to feel that you'd like to hear a shell again. I knew perfectly well when I rejoined at the Drill Hall that I should loathe the trenches as much as ever after the first week, but I felt frightfully excited, all the same, about coming out again. And they sent me out almost

at once. The Sergeant said, 'What! You've had two years of it already! Why, you're a blooming veteran!'"

Tony smiled at the idea of a Drill Hall sergeant contenting himself with such a schoolboy epithet as "blooming"; but it was like Willie Sparrow, who was the issue of a religious home and the work of a woman, to substitute it, even in the company of soldiers, for their favourite word.

Willie did not blanch when told that the Battalion was marching by easy stages to Ypres, and that at one o'clock to-night he and his officer and their kits must be dumped and waiting on the desolate siding under the hill, where the train would start for Hazebrouck.

"Ypres! By jove, sir, how ripping!" he exclaimed. "I've always wanted to see Ypres."

"'See Ypres and——'" began Tony, but changed the words to "It's going to be pretty foul, you know."

"I don't mind, sir. I feel in the mood for anything. I'm going to work like the—like the dickens, and have a shot at getting my stripes."

"And I hope you get 'em," Tony encouraged; and nothing in his face showed his amusement as he pictured this youngster, with the figure and the face of a private in the Church Lads' Brigade and the manners of a junior shopwalker, exercising his command over the Joe Wylies, Art Websters and worse, when they should be floundering in the Salient mud. He tried to imagine the pleasantries of Joe Wylie at being corrected by a child and the plaints of Fred Roberts, and, as the adequate words for them came crowding into his mind, he turned away, for his lip was trembling.

For generating an atmosphere of depression there never was anything invented and set upon the hills of this planet to surpass the great Rest, Reinforcement and Details Camp on the low hills above the station at Etaples. With its railings of barbed wire, its interminable lines of grey huts, its acres of discoloured bell-tents, its dismal Salvation Army and Church Army Recreation Rooms; with its population larger than that of most cities and entirely composed of men, and of men whose thoughts were with the homes they had just left; and with a September day such as this, when the sky was grey, and the dark came down too soon—was there ever before, or will there ever be again, a factory of melancholy on the scale and with the output of Etaples? Is it one's imagining, or is it perhaps the truth,

that this vast sadness which encamped here for four years, has saturated into the sandhills and the barrens about Etaples, and down into that loathly siding in the quarry under the hill, so that one cannot pass these places now, in a holiday train bound for Paris or Basle, without the melancholy that haunts it touching one with its breath?

As the light of this September day went out, Tony sat in his bell-tent, as sorrowfully as most, and thought of Honor. He had been away from her only two days and one night, and already that want of her was beginning to grow in his heart, just as it had done on the ship heading for Gallipoli when Devonport was not three days' run behind. There is but one relief for a mood like this, and it is to take a pen and write to the object of one's thoughts; so he fumbled in his pack and drew out a block of paper. He shook his fountain pen over the circular platform which was the bell-tent's floor, and as the blob of ink dropped, he observed that it added its stain to hundreds of others. The boards were speckled with them. Those ink-stains—Tony stared at them contemplatively—what did they not mean? They meant everything that was good in common men; they were a writing on the floor whose simple characters spelt all those lovely elemental words: home, love, mother, wife, child, peace.

Tony had added his to the others, and now wrote:

"*Here am I, hung up in a Rest Camp at a big base. The Rest, so far, has consisted in sleeping in a bell-tent with five other officers on a wooden floor. But praise the Lord, I am going to be able to get back to my unit almost at once.*

"*Now how good you were to look upon when I was dragged away in the train from Victoria? Dammy, I could have done with a much longer holiday with you and Jill and Peggy, my most congenial companions. I have done some thinking in the long journey between there and here; I have thought how every man has his tiny innermost circle of all, and you three make up mine; and what a pity that, this being so, we should ever be irritable with one another, either I with you, or you with me, or Jill with you, or me with Jill, or Peggy with anyone. I feel now as if I should never want any more than our little dug-out called Sheep's Eye, with you aboard and the rest of the Inner Circle near by, and we'd sneak out to every nice play at the theatre in Brighton, or we'd slip quietly into the cinemas, where it is dark and no one can track us to our hurt. God speed the day when I hang a*

rusty old shrapnel helmet on the wall, and fold up the khaki and put it away with camphor. Oh, if only we can finish it off and pack up this year! Think of that wonderful night when I shall sleep in sheets with every prospect of sleeping thus for ten years! Roll on, Peace; roll on!

"*Plain, isn't it, that I've an attack of homesickness. Well, I'm not ashamed of it; the man who can't be homesick has poorer sensibilities than a pigeon. For a pigeon, when released, does fly at a hundred miles an hour straight home, showing what was in its little pigeon heart all the time. So it's not difficult to understand why Keatings, the old cynic, used to write home 'Dearest and best of mothers,' and even Derek, the reticent, would slop over at times.*

"*I can't get out of my mind that leave train at 7.50 from Victoria; the long platform crowded with men who must fight and women who mustn't weep; the porters' yell, 'Take your seats, please!' and the general disentangling of khaki figures and black figures, and all the khaki figures disappearing through the carriage doors and reappearing through the carriage windows, and all the black figures —mothers and wives and grey fathers and flapping sisters—all remaining on the platform and smiling sheepishly. It was so like the beginning of the school term in my Stratton Lye days, with all the boys travelling back to school—only the boys had grown tall and sprouted toothbrush moustaches, the mothers were getting greyer and one or two of the sisters had ceased to flap. The officers in my carriage, as soon as the train was a hundred yards from Victoria, tried to settle down to 'The Times' and 'Punch' and 'Land and Water.' But they couldn't do it. They preferred to chuck the papers on one side and look out of the window. They were by no means baser than pigeons.*

"*Well, I hope this term will pass quickly and we shall soon be coming home for the holidays.*

"*Love to Mrs. Daubeny, Joyce Daubeny, Jill Daubeny, Susan and Cook.*

"*Love to Mrs. O'Grogan, Peggy O'Grogan, Antony Leonard Daubeny and Michael Derek O'Grogan.*

"*Love to Mrs. Farrer, the Misses Wainwright, Miss Maclaren, Miss Davie, Mrs. Merrick, Colonel Philpot, P. N. Roland, etcetera.*

"*Love, much love to Honor O'Grogan.*"

It was eight-thirty. Tony posted this letter in the Camp post office, and with his trench coat around him, his pack on his back, and Willie Sparrow for his henchman, went down to the little siding under the hill.

CHAPTER V

PASSCHENDAELE I

VLAMERTINGHE, on the road from Poperinghe to Ypres. Vlamertinghe was never bullied like Ypres; never pummelled to the ground, wall by wall; in the autumn of 1917 most of its houses were still standing, though some gaped with shell-holes. Our business is with a single ruined room in Vlamertinghe, and all that it saw and heard on an afternoon in September, 1917.

It was a ground-floor room whose door opened immediately on to the road. Door? There was no door; only a splintered framework with a shell-hole on either side of it. The glass of the windows right and left of this aperture had not survived the visit of the shells but lay in shards on the floor within. The walls were pealing: the coarse paper hung down in dog's-ears and elephant's-ears, but on its stable patches you could see the unfaded squares and oblongs where once had hung the pictures of some contented Flemish family. The boards of the floor were very damp near the street, for the rain had been falling steadily right up to an hour ago: it had ceased now, and beyond the windows shone the light of the revisiting sun. Some shafts of it came into the deserted room, slanting from the apertures to the floor. Perhaps the unexpected smile on the weather's dreary face explained the humming of an aeroplane overhead; but it had no relevance to the tramping of a tired battalion up the street, because battalions must drag on to Ypres, rain or shine.

Suddenly the aeroplane loosed a splutter of machine-gun fire. And again, angrily. Loud voices echoed in the street. "Battalion, halt! . . . Fall out. . . . Take cover. . . ."

Now twenty or more men, in full marching equipment, and with wet ground-sheets slung like capes about their shoulders, came running into the room. Their steel helmets

were covered with sacking or canvas, on which they had painted with copying-ink pencil their regimental "flash." The bolts and muzzles of their rifles were bound with oiled rags to preserve them from the rain and the rust. They unbuckled their equipment muttering curses; and threw themselves down for a brief rest, leaning back on their loaded packs. Some of them, in a mutinous defiance, flung off their equipment altogether and let it fall with a bang and a rattle on to the floor. One of them, Willie Sparrow, sunk down in something like collapse.

Private Fred Roberts remained standing while he delivered himself of a verdict: "Murder. Bloody murder, that's what it is."

Corporal Stott, who sat with his huge back resting against a corner of the room, answered him. "Ah reckon it's what he's paid for, lad."

"'Oo?" demanded Roberts threateningly. White hot-temper had ousted the bewilderment from his patient London face.

Jim cocked a thumb towards the aeroplane. "Old Jerry."

"Oh, I don't mean Jerry," said Roberts. "'*E* done us a kindness by comin' and pottin' at us. Forced that murderin' swine to give us a halt."

As he mentioned the swine he jerked his head towards the doorway and the street.

At this moment Joe Wylie limped in, leading a mongrel dog which was his latest pet. This afternoon he looked perhaps the slovenliest soldier in the British Army. His khaki slacks, which had not recovered from a recent spell at the cook-house, were more black than brown; his puttees, whose spiral journeys still defeated him after three years' daily practice, wandered drunkenly round the calves of his brackety legs; his long Roman nose had reddened under the weather and was dripping, not with rain, but with its own natural moisture; and his old-fashioned Edwardian moustache was in as sorry a case as if he had lately dipped it in a bucket of water. He brushed the back of his wrist under his nose to knock away the discomfortable drip, and kept his hand knowingly over his mouth, as his manner was when he was about to be delivered of a jest, especially if it was a rude one; and the present delivery was a rude one. Indicating the dog with a cock of his eye, he said:

"'E had to fall out on the right of the road. But I sor to it that he was quick abaht it, with old Jerry overhead."

Such of the men as were not too exhausted and dispirited rewarded him with a laugh.

"Joo reckon we're nearly there, Joe?" asked his friend, Art Webster.

"Nah!" Joe assured him most cheerfully. "Nah! We've only jest started, and there's a lot more rain to come yet."

"Well, the rain keeps old Jerry off, any road," said Corporal Stott, who had heard the rumbles of mutiny and, like a good N.C.O., was meeting them with a tactful assuagement.

Fred Roberts broke in again. "I wish I could 'a' stopped one of Jerry's bullets, I tell you straight I do. Anything's better than this slow murder. Twenty bloody miles from Worm'out to Poperinghe, and now abaht another twenty miles to Ee-prez!"

"Yepp," agreed another man, from his place against one of the walls. "And mostly over cobbles!"

Roberts looked out of the doorway again.

"'*E's* got 'is 'orse."

"Yah!" agreed Art Webster, ever ready to echo a dominant opinion. "A mutiny's what *he* wants."

"He'll get it before I'm much older," said Roberts. "That'll finish me, maybe, but it'll finish 'im as a Colonel too."

"How many lads have fallen out?" asked a man.

"Not above twenty," Jim Stott answered pacifically.

"But Sergeant Connan's one of 'em," a voice reminded them. "I've never seen a sergeant fall out before."

"Well, I don't blame him," said Roberts. "Beggared if *I* go much further!"

"Joo think we'll have to go up to the attack directly we get in?" asked someone.

"*Course* we shall," said Roberts. "When they sharpen all our bayonets, and put the officers into tommy's kit and keep back a sprinkling of officers and N.C.O.s on the Dump to make a new battalion out of, in case us fellers never come back no more, it means——" he nodded his head significantly, leaving its meaning to the imagination of his hearers.

"Yes," agreed Art Webster sadly, "it means we're going up to the Doings . . ."

A silence acknowledged the truth of this.

"'Oo's winning this 'ere Passchendaele battle?" asked another voice.

Joe Wylie, who had now arranged his dog and was about to

sit down, turned and repeated the question in the manner of a comedy duo.

"'Oo's winnin'?"

"Yes."

"'Oo's winnin', yer say?"

"Yes."

"We're both of us winnin', ain't we?" he asked; and sat down.

A man, who had not so far spoken, offered his remark.

"I can do one more mile," he said, "and then I'm finished, British Empire or no British Empire."

"Thet's right," endorsed Roberts. "I'm jest about through with it too. If the battalion arrives with a quarter of its men I shall be surprised. And I'm praying to the devil it won't. If we was all to act together——" the rest was supplied by a setting of the jaw and a grim nod.

Some sullen murmurings supported him, followed by the silence of exhausted and miserable men.

It was Joe Wylie who broke the silence.

"Did I ever tell you this one, boys?"

"Not aboov a hoondred times, I reckon, Joe," said Jim Stott, laughing; and there was a relief in his tone, "but get on with it."

"Did I ever tell you how I came to join this rotten crah'd?"

"No. Get on with it, Joe," said Jim.

"Well, I went to the Recruiting Sergeant, and he was all over me with 'is welcomin' smiles; and he says, 'Yes, me lad, what can I do for you?' So I says, 'I thought abah't joining this army of yours.' And 'e says, 'Yes, well, thank you very much. I shall be pleased to do anything I can for you.'" (Laughter.) "'What regiment would you like?' I says, '*What?*' He says, 'What regiment would you like? The Kevelry?' And I says, 'Nah! I don't want the Kevelry. There you efta wash yerself and the 'orse as well.' So he says, 'Would you like to be an awficer?' So I says, 'What are they?' And he says, 'Why, those there are awficers.' So I says, '*Nah!* I don't want to be one of them little fellers.'" (Much laughter.) "So he goes on, 'Well, what abah't the Infantry?' And I says, 'They're the fellers that do the marchin', aren't they?' '*Wurl*,' he says; 'just a little nah and then.'" (Laughter.) "Aw, I turned *them* dah'n all right. So he asks, 'What abah't the artillery? Nice lads, the artillery are; oh, awful nice lads.' And I says, 'They're

the gunners, aren't they?' He says, '*Yurse!*' And I says, 'That's me lot.' And he says, 'Thank you so much. Gunners, you said? Right. Thank you for calling.' And he shook hands with me and smiled me ah't. Next mornin' I rolls up, and he says, 'You go to the Royal West Essex and git a move on about it.' So I began, 'But them's infantry, and you said——' but then he bellers me dah'n, 'Get and do what you're told, you stinking lah'sy scum. Don't answer back! *You're in the army now!*'"

The men, momentarily forgetting their misery, laughed delightedly; and Joe enjoyed the tale as much as any of them and repeated the last words at a higher pitch: "'Don't answer me back!' 'e says. 'You're in the army now!'"

"Gawd! you're some liar, Joe!" said a soldier.

Joe brushed his finger along his nose and pursued his success. "And did I ever tell you this one? When I was standing with the crah'd watchin' the West Essex getting fell in, in August, 1914——"

"Oh, shut up with your joking," Roberts suddenly interjected. He saw that the mutinous threats of a minute ago were being dissolved in laughter; and they had sorted much better with his present mood. "There's things best not joked about but resisted. We don't want to forget that we're being treated worse than cattle. If we all stood together he couldn't shoot the lot of us, could he?"

"Nah, he couldn't do that," Joe admitted, though obviously anxious to continue his entertainment. "Nah, he couldn't do that, bust him, but did I ever tell you this one? Did I ever tell you abah't——"

But he didn't tell them that afternoon, for Captain Scrase stood in the doorway glancing round his men. Scrase was wearing the tunic of a tommy, with three stars on its shoulder-straps, and instead of his Sam Browne, a webbing belt.

"Bit tired, men?" he inquired, pleasantly.

"Oh no, sir," Joe answered in friendly impudence. "We're just loving it. Jest beginnin' to get the real feel of the road."

"Well, we're not far from our map reference now. Three miles'll see us in."

"Three more miles," muttered Fred Roberts, aside. "Hell!"

The Colonel appeared behind Scrase.

"There he is!" hissed Roberts. "There's the s——!"

"Oh, Scrase," called the Colonel; and Scrase went out to

him, so that they stood together, out of earshot of the men. "Is this true about Sergeant Connan, that he fell out about half an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, by heaven, put O'Grogan on your horse and send him to find Connan and to tell him that if he doesn't catch up with the battalion in ten minutes I'll put him under arrest."

"Yes, sir."

"N.C.O.s *don't* fall out. God, when it's all we shall be able to do to get the men in to-night, to have a sergeant setting the example of falling out!"

"Could he have my horse a bit, sir!" asked Scrase.

"Hell, no. Can the men have horses?"

"He dropped as he walked, sir."

"Then he'll drop a rank or two in the army. I'm having no weaklings for sergeants in this battalion. How are these men?"

"Pretty well exhausted, sir."

"The devil they are! Then help them along with the rough edge of your tongue a bit. They'll need it after Sergeant Connan's behaviour."

"I find it hard to strafe them, sir." An utterable weariness escaped in Scrase's accents.

"You've got to, man!"

No sympathy sounded in the Colonel's voice. Its hardness just then was even excessive. But perhaps the softer man, whom everyone knew to be hidden behind this hoarding of Prussianism, peeped out as he continued more quietly: "It's when men are at breaking-point that you must curse them as never before . . . because if you speak kindly to them they break down. . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"God! if we start pitying them now, and they start pitying themselves, what about a few days hence when they're floundering in the mud, under fire? . . . No, I never heard such nonsense."

He hesitated a few seconds; turned; and entered the room.

"Here, you men! Who said you could throw off your equipment? Put it on again. You can undo it, that's all. Hurry up! Get a move on about it! You've got to be ready to shift any moment." His eye fell on Willie Sparrow, who had collapsed to the ground like a tumbled scarecrow and was now staring bemusedly at him as if asleep with eyes

still open. " Get up and try and look like a soldier. Haven't you a spine at all ? " The quick eye swept round and perceived the sullen, threatening slowness in the movements of Fred Roberts ; and to him he shouted in a voice that made even that mutineer shrink : " *Will you hurry, man !* If that equipment isn't on in ten seconds, you'll spend to-morrow tied to a limber-wheel. I know that look of yours and, by God, I'll break it ! Listen here, men : anyone who falls out between now and the end of the march will explain the reason why at Orderly Room to-morrow ; and if there's any skin left on his feet at all, he'll be *for* it. Beginning to be sorry for yourselves, because you've half a blister on your foot, when there's men ahead of you dying in shell-holes with hardly any feet at all ! " And then, as ill chance would have it, his eye alighted on Joe Wylie. " And what the devil are you ? "

" Mr. O'Grogan's batman, sir."

" But heavens alive ! Look at your slacks, man. What do you mean by parading like that ? "

" I used to be in the cook ah'se, sir. It's a dirty job, cookin'."

" Oh, is it ? Let me see you looking like that when we get in and I'll find you a damn-sight dirtier job on Defaulters. I warn you all : any slovenly marching, and when the battalion gets in to-night, you'll go back to the last halt and march it all over again." He turned to give his parting thrust to Joe Wylie. " And you : get out of my sight. I'm ashamed to have a soldier like you under my command. Come with me, Scrase."

Roberts watched the two officers go out into the street. His head nodded in contempt and hatred. " And now go and get on yer 'orse," he said to the Colonel's back.

" And *Gawd* . . . *blister* . . . his *buttocks* . . . when he gets there," added Joe Wylie, with deep feeling.

Unheeding, Roberts faced round upon the men, who were seating themselves again. " Are you going to fall for that sort of thing ? "

" Got to, I suppose," Joe Wylie shrugged. And he had just pulled out his mouth-organ and was shaping a tune on it when the moan of an oncoming shell pricked up all ears, and the men ducked down and stayed down till they heard the shell detonate some hundred yards away. A voice muttered, " Christ ! that was close."

" Yon aeroplane reported us, Ah reckon," Jim Stott suggested.

Another shell was whining towards them, and all ducked; and some of the more exhausted men uttered exclamations of misery and despair. The explosion sounded in the same place. They were just straightening themselves again when a third shell came and moaned over their salaaming heads and joined the others. Joe, with his face still in the floor, began to chant, "One a penny, two a penny, roipe bananas;" and then, looking up and seeing the shell-holes on either side of the doorway, sang, "The shell-holes round the door, Make me love mother more;" while the men, since no more shells seemed on the way, resumed their seated positions.

"What we want," said Roberts, "is a bit of the spirit of the trade unions. Fair conditions or nothing doing."

"Eh, boot they've got us on toast all right," laughed Jim Stott. "We can't do that or we should let t'Huns through, tha knows."

"I don't see that we should be any the worse off if they *did* come," said Roberts.

Many voices murmured their agreement, and then all seemed to sink again into their exhaustion and despondency. There was silence; a silence for Joe to break.

"Did I ever tell you this one, boys?"

"Aye, sure as muk," said Jim Stott, "but it's time tha gev it 'em agen. There's soom you've noan towd it to, 'appen."

"It's abaht lice."

"Aboot *what?*"

"Lice. There's one bin tickling me a bit, and it reminded me of a feller in the Awstrylian Light 'Orse. Never 'eard the story of the Awstrylian? Oh, it's a great 'un. There was an Awstrylian sittin' in a trench on Gallipoli, and along come his Brigadier—and, well, you know how Awstrylians talk to their Brigadiers?"

"Yes." All agreed that they knew that.

"Well, the Brigadier sees that the Awstrylian had his riding breeks on the wrong way rahn'd, seams ah'tward; and he says, 'Ello, digger!' he says; 'wodger got your breeks on inside ah't for?' And the Awstrylian says, 'Wurl, Brig.,' he says, 'it's loike this: if we turns our breeks inside ah't, these little fellers 'ave to walk all the way dah'n the seams and rahn'd to the other side if they're to draw any rations at all.'" (Laughter.) "'And when we can feel that they've got rahn'd, we turn our breeks *in*side in again, and then the little fellers

'ave to do their journey all over again; and when they've done it, we turns our breeks rahn'd a third time, and off they 'ave to march again, and Brig., it breaks their bloody 'arts.'"

A great laugh greeted the story; and in it, unbeknown to all, the spirit of mutiny was disabled again.

Meanwhile the shafts of sunlight had disappeared, and the pattering of rain sounded in the road.

"'Ello!" called Joe. "Git ready, boys. It's raining now, so they'll take us out for a rinse again."

And at the same instant there was the report of a British howitzer, and a shell moaned past on its way to the enemy's lines.

"Hear that?" Joe shouted excitedly. "That's one of our batteries answerin' the feller that opened on us!"

The gunfire continued; and there was the roar of a low ascending aeroplane.

"Gaw!" cried Art Webster. "They're awf to put 'paid' to *his* account. Gahn! give it 'im 'ot!"

From the street came the shouts of officers and N.C.O.s. "Fall in, men. . . . Fall in. . . . Fall in."

All in the room climbed to their feet, and buckled up their equipment. Joe attached his dog, as Scrase, looking in, said: "Come on, men. Hurry up."

"Only sixty more miles, ain't it, sir?" asked Joe.

"Yes, Joe; and perhaps a bit more," laughed Scrase. "Stick it out."

"And do they give us an hour on the treadmill after that?"

"Yes, I expect so. . . . Hurry up, men."

Scrase departed.

"*I'm* not hurrying for no one," said the sullen Roberts. "D'you mean to say you're going to take *his* bullying without a kick of any sort?"

"'Oo's?" asked Joe.

"The Colonel."

"Oh, *'im*. Don't you worry about 'im, Freddy. He may strafe us, but there's one consolation"—Joe whispered the consolation, nodding very confidentially—"he's probably afeared of the Sergeant-Major."

This drew another laugh from his mates, and in the universal good-humour one of them called out, "Fall in, the Guards!"

"Don't say 'Fall in, the *Guards!*" corrected Joe beseechingly, as they all filed out. "'Fall in, the *Guard*' is the right

expression. '*Guards*'? Gaw! Not to fellers like these. Why, the Guards are a *fine* body of men." (Much laughter.) "Come on! Only six more sky-lines, boys."

A few minutes later the deserted room heard the tramping of hundreds of feet past its window, and the music of a mouth-organ playing, "There's a Friend for little children."

They camped in the flat meadows behind Ypres. A few huts, and some tents, each surrounded with a low wall of sandbags, were awaiting them there. A cemetery, enclosed in barbed wire, spread itself at the camp's side. Joe Wylie, pointing to it as they filed in, shouted "There's the Rest Camp, boys. Jest a little turn in the trenches, and we come back there and be reely comfortable." They had not been long in the tents before they learned that the next evening at dusk they would go forward and join the 14th battalion in Railway Wood.

The officers grimaced at one another.

Scrase, as usual, revealed none of his thoughts by word or manner. Not once, since they came to France, had he reported to Tony of the fear that haunted him; nor had Tony, in these places, thought it wise even to hint at the conversations which they had had together in the Desert of Sinai. He knew that their friendship was strong and deep, but that it drew back shyly from spoken words. Throughout these months Scrase's manner, except for a few lapses when the weariness escaped into his voice, had been that of a keen, punctilious Company Commander, who took pride in his efficiency. Only Tony knew that he was acting; Colonel Tappiter suspected it, perhaps; and so did that hidden Moulden, who watched from behind his steady, friendly—his all too steady and friendly—gaze. And to-night Scrase had donned the best garb of liveliness he could drag from his bag of stage properties. If he sank into abstraction at times, well, others were doing that too. And the stutter that occasionally invaded his speech, and the catch in his breathing that halted it once or twice—who but Tony even noticed these symptoms? Moulden, perhaps.

And Moulden himself: had he his private fears? Devil knew: Tony had retired from the effort to know. The man showed nothing of himself. He affected the uniform wear

of sardonic humour which others bore so naturally; and, as always, it seemed to fit him but poorly.

As for Tony, his throat was alight with the same excitement that had possessed him before Romani and before El Arish; the same impatient restlessness which lit one's brain like wine and was all the more pleasurable and stimulating because pungently flavoured with hints of death or physical pain. To-night it was a stronger wine than ever in Sinai. The battle was certain this time: the German Line was there—dour, full-front, rooted, terrible—it couldn't melt into the desert like the Turkish redan at El Arish. To-night it was certain that within twenty-four hours—or forty-eight or ninety hours—he would have won his fame or be lying dead.

The next afternoon, smoking a cigarette at his tent door, he saw Padre Quickshaw loafing thoughtfully towards them, over the threadbare grass. No more to-day in France than yesterday in Sinai did the little man look like an officer; his tin helmet, pushed back from a moist forehead, was covered with the usual sacking envelope; his tunic, stained with grease and mud, was gathered in by a tommy's webbing belt instead of an officer's Sam Browne, and since it was too large and loose for him, having been bought from Ordnance, it pleated itself into the belt like a woman's blouse; his breeches were the same coarse whipcord riding breeches (drawn from Ordnance and never paid for) that he had worn since Sinai; and his boots, now caked with mud, were the high artillery boots as issued to the least of the gunners.

"Good morning," said he, when near enough to the C Company officers.

"Mornin', padre."

"You're going to Railway Wood to-night, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Lord, what a spot! I've been there for the last three days with the 14th."

"How are they getting on, padre?"

"Not too brightly."

"Have they been over the top yet?"

"Yes, worse luck."

"Many casualties?"

"Oh, only about half of 'em. The French are mutinying, so we're carrying on the war in the meantime. That's what the battle of Passchendaele is about, as far as I can make out."

"*Sh! Sh!*" Scrase rebuked him, feigning dismay at such frankness. "We can crime you for setting rumours about. But, padre: who's dead in the 14th?"

"Rodgers and Mayne, and young Oakley, and Major Hudson, and Lord Ayr."

These answers of Quickshaw, in response to their pumping, came out of him as dully and impersonally as the offerings of an automatic machine; evidently his thoughts, like his eyes, were elsewhere.

"Going up to-night, you said?" he asked, suddenly.

"Even so," Scrase admitted.

"What time?" The question was thrown out in an apparent carelessness.

"Parade about five."

"H'm. . . . Well . . . I don't know when I shall be able to get to you again, so I think I'll have a service here this afternoon. Yes; may as well have it to-day as any other time."

"Quite, padre."

"Yes," affirmed Quickshaw. "I think it had better be a Communion Service, hadn't it?"

"Just as you like, padre." Scrase smiled a general blessing on all his acts.

"Yes; then those who want to communicate can, and those who don't can just join in the prayers, if they like. That'll be all right, won't it?"

"Quite, padre. No complaints."

"Think any of 'em'll come?"

"Oh, yes . . . one or two."

"I'll have it in the open, I think. They'll be more likely to roll up then—they're such fools!"

"Yes; a door *does* frighten them rather."

"I know. They make me sick, like that. . . . Well, I'll go and see old Tappiter about it, and then wander round and tell the men."

Tony watched him as he poked his head into the C.O.'s tent, omitting to salute, and, after a talk with the Colonel within, strolled away among the men, now speaking to a group of them, and now disappearing into a hut or tent. He guessed that Quickshaw was repeating to them his "May as well have it to-day as any other time. Don't know when I shall get to you again," and uttering it as casually as possible, since

neither he nor any one of them could have spoken without abashment of a grander reason for waiting on God at three o'clock of a week-day afternoon, in a meadow west of Ypres. Sympathy for the little man welled up in Tony, and he became as anxious for the success of the service as Quickshaw himself could be—though Quickshaw's anxiety, presumably, was for God's sake, and Tony's for Quickshaw's. He resolved to do some parish visiting himself and induce a few men to come to the service, that their presence might encourage the others and the padre be not disappointed.

He began with himself. Yes, he would attend, but he would not receive—oh, he would have liked to-day to possess the faith of his childhood and to be able to bow his head before a Master present in the meadow. But he had no such faith, and it was useless to pretend that he had. Still, he would kneel with the others and try to pray, and perhaps his example would be of help to simpler men.

This point at rest, he walked among the batmen to impress them into the good work. And here he became quite uplifted by success. With Willie Sparrow, who was Wimborne's servant now, he had no difficulty. He just mentioned the service and said, "You'll be coming along, I suppose, Willie?" and the boy answered, "Oh, rather, sir!" Art Webster, who had always had an eye turned towards religion, though up to now, it must be confessed, his eye had never exercised any restraint over the irreverent lips beneath, much less led his body after it into church—Art Webster proved an easy capture too. He was bent over a canvas bucket, washing Moulden's shirt, and he perked up an ear to catch these exchanges between Mr. O'Grogan and "young Sparrer"; then straightened himself up and came forward.

"Beg pardon, sir; but do you think it'd be all right if I come too. I mean, I ain't bin properly to church—aw! not for donkey's years—and I suppose I'm not—well, you know what I mean, sir—not absolutely It, as the saying goes, but I was brought up religious, and once I as near as possible got confirmed, sir. I was sent to me classes, but got cuttin' of 'em, and the minister thought I'd better wait a bit longer."

"If you want to come, of course you can," said his officer.

"Thenk you, sir. Then I think I will. Yes, I'd like to come."

"But I'm afraid if you've never been confirmed, you won't be able to——"

"Oh no, sir. I understand, sir." Webster accepted this ruling with the humility of all good sinners. "I never thought o' doin' *that*, sir."

Joe Wylie was a more difficult problem. Tony, seeing him engaged with a jack-knife and a hunk of cheese, and hearing him send the last of a dubious story to the men in the tent behind and guffaw with laughter over it, was tempted to play the part of Jonah when sent to preach to Nineveh; to turn about, that is, and journey in the opposite direction. But he meditated a moment and then spoke.

"Hallo, Wylie. . . . Look here, the padre's going to have a service."

"What, sir?"

"There's going to be a service this afternoon."

"Where, sir?"

"Here."

"Oh my Gawd!"

This was discouraging; but Tony carried on.

"It's voluntary of course; but you've got to come too—just to help it along."

"Me, sir!"

"Yes."

"*Me?* Gawd forgive yer, sir."

"Yes, you. Everybody's coming, and so are you."

"No, thenk you, sir, if you down mind. I got a bit aht of this church business."

"Rubbish. Ever been confirmed?"

"Bin *what*, sir?"

"Confirmed by a bishop?"

"Oh, *that?* Nah, sir; not on your life! I remember when I was a nipper, our minister wanted to do me; but I slipped it all right. Then Mr. Quickshaw, 'e got at me about it. But it's no bon, sir; these stunts to make you good jest don't come awf. I told 'im I'd tried it before. Tib, my missus—I've told you about Tib, haven't I—she had a time—lor' bless me, it makes me laugh, if you knew Tib—she had a religious time, when she was always wanting me to go to her meetings, and between 'em, they nearly got me: the old preacher, he was that impressive and holy I decided—all on a sudden like—that it was time I pulled up me socks and

got shut of me sins. But I tried it, sir"—Joe made a deprecatory *moue* with his mouth—"and it didn't come awf—sum-hah."

"Yes, but—look here, it can't do you any harm to come to this service."

"No, I wouldn't say as it'd do that."

"Well, I want you to come to oblige the padre. You needn't take any part beyond being there. I want to get him a good congregation to start with. Will you come?"

"Wurl, if you put it like that, sir——"

"Yes, you enjoy singing hymns."

"Wurl, I down mind if I do, sir."

"Excellent."

"Is it soon, sir?"

"Almost at once, I think."

"Gaw! I'll go and get a bit of a rinse."

The sun came to church that afternoon: it burst from behind a cloud and played upon the camp table which Padre Quickshaw was setting up in an open space of the field and covering with a linen cloth. And against Tony's expectations, a large number of men, coming singly or in small groups, began to assemble at a respectful distance from the table, and to stand about there, looking very uncomfortable; while Quickshaw arranged his silver vessels and drew over his head a crumpled surplice and tossed a green stole about his neck. The surplice, which was a short one so that he could push it into a pocket, reached no further than his khaki knees; and it promptly fell to the right side, as if to balance the green stole which worked its way downwards to the left. Some officers were strolling up now, and Tony watched them, much interested to see who would come. Here was Childe Harold, polished up as if for a King's Parade, and trying to look at ease—bravo, Harold! for, as Tony knew, the boy had been feeling ill all day; here was Moulden—what were *his* secret motives for coming along? and here was Scrase—fancy Scrase, the intellectual rebel, attending church! No Hughes Anson—no, Rosy was not the sort who would come to church, even to set an example. No Aylwin—of course not, nasty little intellectual snob! Tony turned his head to see how the congregation behind was getting on, for by now he was feeling a personal interest in it. Oh, fine! there must be a hundred men standing about, and more were coming along, in ones and

twos, from the tents—almost running—encouraged by the fact that such an ample crowd had preceded them and therefore they need not appear ridiculous.

When Quickshaw had completed his preparations, he knelt on the muddy earth before his altar; whereupon some of the officers, wondering if they were doing right, and glancing at their neighbours to see what *they* were doing, knelt down also; and immediately the men near-by copied them; and those behind, in a series of rapid instalments, copied their brothers, since none had the least desire to be left standing. And it was when they were all kneeling thus that Colonel Tappiter, with belt and boots and buttons shining, came slowly across the field from his tent and knelt behind his men.

But Padre Quickshaw had knelt only to say a private prayer. He arose, and turning about, was surprised to see all his congregation on its knees.

"No—oh Lord, no—you needn't kneel," he explained impatiently. "As you were! Not in this ghastly mud. It'll be enough if those of you"—he paused because they were all getting up now, and he wanted to be heard—"if those of you who are going to receive will just kneel when the time comes. The rest of you—I want you to enjoy this service, if you can. It's good stuff, you know. There's the Confession, you see . . . and the Absolution . . . and the Blessing . . . And we'll have a hymn or two. Now, if you'll—eh, what? what's that?"

This was sharply addressed to a tall, grey-haired corporal, quite unknown to the battalion, who had appeared from a hut where a detachment of the R.A.M.C. was billeted; and now a whispering conversation ensued between him and Quickshaw, while the service waited. An odd couple they made: the tall, well-built R.A.M.C. corporal, smart with his grey hair and his trim khaki, looking down, but with deference, upon the padre; and the short, spare padre, in his crumpled surplice and dangling stole, looking up at the corporal, with that expression of his which was meant for friendliness but always resembled a goggle-eyed indignation. Those nearest the whisperers heard Quickshaw say, "Of course, if you like . . . certainly . . . thank you. . . . Yes, by all means. . . ."

After the conversation the corporal did not fall back and join the congregation, but, much to everybody's surprise, stayed

one pace to the rear and the right of Quickshaw, with his face to the altar like an acolyte.

Quickshaw announced a hymn—not a very original hymn, but an easy one: "O God, our help in ages past;" and the congregation sang it well, so that the men in the tents and huts came to their doors to look on. Then in a loud voice, because he had every intention of being heard, he carried the service through to the Consecration Prayer, before which he turned round and asked the men to keep their heads bowed. And when he had said the prayer in a very low voice, and himself partaken of the sacred elements, and given them before anyone else to the grey-haired corporal at his side, he took the chalice and put it into this man's hands, and they both faced the congregation, Quickshaw with the paten uplifted before his breast and the corporal with the chalice. This corporal of the R.A.M.C. was an Anglican priest.

A long pause. Either there was no man who cared to approach the sacrament first and presumptuously, or a British respect for rank lived even in the presence of Him before Whom all rank is as nothing, so that no man would go before his Colonel; but Padre Quickshaw was compelled to crane his head and telegraph a look to Colonel Tappiter, who straightway took off his spectacles and came forward—was not the padre in command? Colonel Tappiter came up a lane which had opened itself between the standing men; and very many fell in behind and followed him.

CHAPTER VI

PASSCHENDAELE II

NOW it was dusk; and they were marching through the city of Ypres, up towards the murmuring throb of the battle; and in the half-darkness the eyes of all, men and officers both, were turning left and right to feed upon the interest around them. It was the first time they had come by these spectral ruins, and, though for two years the world had been showing them its battlefields, they were as interested in this, the war's crowning and immortal desolation, as any civilian sightseer paying the pilgrimage of a day to the scene of war. They were thrilled, good simple men; thrilled as they passed the cascaded tower of the Cathedral and the pallid fangs of the Cloth Hall; thrilled to think that their feet were tramping the cobbles of the Grande Place of Ypres; and that their eyes were meeting a signpost which pointed right with the words, "To the Menin Gate." The Menin Gate! Veterans of Gallipoli and Sinai, they felt much like a school of children who were being led among sacred places; in their deep interest they forgot that themselves were going forward to do a thing no different from that which all the ghostly battalions had done, who had gone this way before and given their sanctity to these stones.

"To the Menin Gate, boys!" Why, soon they would be treading the famous Menin Road. Soon they would be seeing Hell Fire Corner!

Oh, if there was a stirring in the blood of all, even the dullest, what was the turmoil in the heart of Lieut. O'Grogan, who wanted to write poetry? This—this was the Menin Gate! One couldn't grasp the thought. Those twin piles of bricks, were they the original pillars of the gate? He and his men were clattering over a wooden bridge—"Break step—Break step, damn you"—and he turned and looked behind: then

those were the city ramparts, and that moat or stream the Yser water! Think of it! All Britain, warring in France, had sooner or later come out through that gate and clattered over the bridge and trod this *pavé*. All, for was there a brigade that sooner or later didn't come to do its *devoir* in the Salient? The First Battle of Ypres had had to be fed with men, and the Second, and all the following years. Years! Yes, three years now; and all the time they had been pouring through the gate—the city clerks of London, the squat little mill-hands of Lancashire, the tough miners of Wales, the tall farm-lads from the Home Counties, the dare-devil giants from Australia—marching neither to victory nor to defeat, but simply into liquid mud, intensive bombardments, gas and bombs; for the line round Ypres had hardly moved in all the years. Like Verdun, it had held, that was all; and the enemy did not pass.

The head of the column was now beyond the few houses that stood outside the gate, and only the last company was yet clattering over the bridge; and in the thickening darkness a silence had fallen upon all the men, when suddenly two foot-sore and mud-bespattered Highlanders, returning into Ypres, with a third lagging twenty paces behind, trudged wearily into the view of C Company, and instantly Joe Wylie called out, "That's all that's left of *that* battalion, boys!" and earned his roar of laughter.

Love and pride caught at Tony's heart. Ah yes, it was in such a manner, and with such a national music, that Britain passed through the Menin Gate.

Now he too was beyond the buildings, and the open country stretched away in slight undulations on either side of the *pavé*. Nothing human was to be seen upon its face, for the dug-outs of the innumerable batteries were beneath the ground. Only here and there a light glimmered from some dug-out door; and far away to the north there was a little conflagration where the camouflage over a gun had taken fire. A reek—the familiar reek of Gallipoli and of the Romani sands—the reek of a world at war—came blowing in from the west. Also a scent of pear-drops—yes, unmistakable: tear gas was falling somewhere. He swept his eyes around the horizon and saw a ring of flashes and flares making an everlasting scintillation on the night sky; almost a complete ring; the ring of the Salient. God! he was within the Salient; could

he believe it? This Salient, it was the theatre, surely, of one of the world's strangest victories. Not a spectacular forward march, but—what? A strange immobilized triumph that had lasted from Britain's first contact with the enemy three years ago till now; till this hour when he himself came to the Salient and saw it standing all about him as it had stood any time in the years—unbroken and not to be broken, filthy and despairing, but unconquerable. Such an uncomely triumph, won by sick-hearted men in an atmosphere of grumblings, blasphemies and jests! This Salient, ringed round with fire, was the apotheosis of nothing more beautiful than Obstinacy; but was not Obstinacy perhaps, in the final count, as grand a thing as human nature could show? Had human nature found a nobler type than Prometheus, bound, defeated, defiant and conquering? And as he thought of Prometheus, he remembered—who would not?—the words that Shelley cried to him, and so wonderful was their aptness that he was startled; they seemed to speak for him so perfectly the meaning of the Salient; to sing that strange uncomely triumph which his eyes had been dimly seeing—and oh, as he thought of them he felt he could throw away for ever his anxiety about personal fame and cared for nothing but to take his place, lonely and unwitnessed, among other men in the glory of the Salient:

> To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite:
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
> To defy Power which seems omnipotent;
> To love and bear; to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent:
> This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
> Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free;
> This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

All the stars were out to-night, the rain after its six days of unremitting labour keeping a holiday on the seventh. But no doubt it would begin again to-morrow. The rumble and beat of the guns, and the tapping of small-arm fire, were there as always. To this everlasting back-curtain of sound our story has given but scanty description because it was both there and not there: the men had almost ceased to hear it,

even as sleepers in an Alpine hut cease after a while to hear the beat of the wind in the mountains. It was just in its place, like the sky overhead or the earth beneath their feet.

The platoons were marching with long intervals between them, for fear of direct hits by the shells; and Tony, whose eyes were now used to the dark, could see that the leading men had turned to the left and were plodding across country. They seemed to be on a raised embankment, for their steel helmets, and the muzzles of their rifles and their weighted shoulders went along silhouetted against the sky.

Now his own platoon was at the turning-point, and he saw that a railway track cut the road here and ran along between the buried batteries. At the angle of railway track and *pavé* stood a notice board: "Hell Fire Corner." So this was the infamous spot! Funny to be taking it thus casually in one's stride! A railway track, did we say? devil a rail was left, or a sleeper, and not very much of the track; but one could just recognize it for what it was, because its line of collapsing fragments ran geometrically straight through the shell-pocked country. *Railway Wood.* Of course: the wood to which they were going must have taken its name from this line and would lie somewhere alongside of it.

How sluggish a thing is imagination! Even up to this minute Tony was picturing Railway Wood as an assembly of high, if charred and splintered, tree trunks. But nothing of the sort. It wasn't on the surface of the ground at all, but underneath it. They arrived at a rounded tumulus of glistening mud, with low lintelled doorways in its side, like the entrances to mine shafts or mine adits; and not a tree, not a trunk, not a stump lifted itself above the mud. Perhaps the daylight would show a few spikes and jags on the crown of the hummock, but in the darkness there was nothing but its smooth arc against the sky.

They filed into one of the shafts; it had a stair which went down and down and down. At the bottom was a long low gallery dimly lit by electric light. Its floor streamed with water, which reflected the sparse lamps, for to-night the drainage system had failed to cope with yesterday's rain. Off this corridor, which must be fifteen feet or more below the surface, there were narrow cells in which six, eight, or a dozen men could be housed; and Scrase was directing the men into these. Where the ground had sunk the water stood in stagnant

pools ; and as they splashed through it, they stirred up a smell of sewage. One guessed that though there were latrines in these underground galleries the less scrupulous men neglected to use them. The roof was not high enough for Tony to walk upright, so he removed his helmet and splashed on with crouching shoulders. Once his skull struck a low beam, and, rushing his hand to the painful bruise, he felt that it was wet, not with blood, but with the moisture that was percolating down from the soaked earth above. They came to a place where this corridor met several others, and a notice board under the lamp said " Clapham Junction."

For themselves the C Company officers found a room eight feet long with a table and two crude benches, one of which stood in an inch of water.

" So this is Railway Wood ! " said Moulden, flinging off helmet and pack.

" Can you beat it ? " demanded Childe Harold cheerfully, but his teeth were chattering.

" It's a pretty little spinney," said Tony.

" I wonder they don't call it Bluebell Wood," said Scrase. " Its scents are those of the spring."

And Aylwin gave a learned description of the methods employed by the Tunnelling Company which had made it, of its drainage system, its electric light plant, and its present garrison of R.E.s.

" Well, that may be," laughed Harold, his teeth still chattering, " but I guess it's fine sitting in a sewer. We've been moles ; now we're sewer rats."

" Where shall we sleep ? " asked Moulden.

" Scrase, being O.C., will sleep on the table," said Aylwin, " and Moulden by his side—*good-night !* what a bed-fellow ! O'Grogan'll have one bench and I the other, and Harold will sleep in the water on the floor."

" Oh, will he ! " scoffed the Childe.

Childe Harold was labouring to be cheerful, but Tony kept an anxious eye roaming his way. The boy had confided to him that afternoon, with much reviling of fate, that all the symptoms of a slight fever were shivering through his body. " I didn't mean to tell anyone, Bungay," he had said, " but I think I shall feel better if I let loose a grumble on you. Isn't it the thickest luck ever ? It was that rain yesterday that did it. I got chilled through. I feel absolutely bloody. And

I can't go sick. It would be too awful to go sick just when my platoon is really going to war. I'll stick it out, but Jehoshaphat! I do feel putrid."

And now in the wretched light of a single electric bulb Tony studied the boy; he could see the shivering of his body and the autonomous vibration of his jaw as he sat hunched forward.

And as they sat on bench and table, their silence expressing the gloom they would not speak in words, they suddenly turned their ears towards a thudding overhead, as of light shells which were failing to detonate; their contact with the ground could be heard—or felt; but no muffled explosion. And immediately the cry came down the corridor, "Gas! . . . Gas! . . ."

Scrase swore; he ordered Moulden to run and see that the blanket gas-curtain was lowered at the entrance of the shaft; and himself ran out, struggling with his gas-mask, to ensure that the men were putting on theirs. Tony followed, after shouting to Wimborne and Aylwin to stay where they were. Before he could get the mouthpiece between his teeth and the pincers at his nostrils he smelt the whiff of phosgene.

Their tasks done, they returned to the room, and all five officers resumed their gloomy session on benches and table. They just sat there like goblins, with their faces in the hideous masks and their feet in the water. Their lips were silenced, because you cannot speak in a gas-mask without removing the mouthpiece; their eyes were blinded, because the heat, exuded from their skins, had quickly clouded the windows of the masks; and their noses were pinched out of use. And then in quick succession two significant things happened. First, so Tony always remembered, he was cynically demanding of himself whether this was not the rock-bottom of discomfort, and whether he still believed that the thrills, excitements, and beauties of war transcended its bestiality, and to his own astonishment something instinctive, something in his blood rather than his reason, had cried the answer: "Yes! This is wonderful! Would I be sleeping comfortably in my bed instead of being here? Not I." And he had just heard this unexpected answer from some hidden and essential self when Harold Wimborne groaned and rolled from his bench to the floor.

They all hurried to his help, and all—this was the second curious memory—impatiently and angrily pulled off their

masks that they might be freer to help him. They lifted him on to the table, and Aylwin ran for the M.O.

"I shall be all right. I shall be all right," mumbled the boy. "Don't send me down. Don't send me down."

And at the same moment the "Gas Clear!" sounded.

The M.O. arrived.

"Don't send me down," begged Childe Harold.

The M.O. did not send Wimborne down. As a matter of fact very little gas had penetrated the galleries, but enough to overthrow the Childe, who was already sick. And the others suffered nothing from having torn off their masks. But they had not foreseen this when they did it.

Thirty hours after, and it is time to go up to the line. The battle is before six in the morning. "Come, tumble out, all you men. Get a move on. Tumble out there."

Is it death?

The night is still the stars'. Forward in single file along the duck-boards, and for God's sake be as quiet as you can. Keep touch. Watch your step, for if you slither off the duck-boards, you may sink above your knees in the mud or be drowned in a shell-hole. Right: push ahead. "Tread thou carefully on the end of the duck-board lest haply the other end arise and smite thee."

Stop that laughing.

Awmighty! what's that? Did yer see that cove lyin' there? He'd gawn black and was covered with vermin—crawlin' with it.

Pooh, pass the oder-kolone, someone.

Probably some poor s—— of a runner shot off the duck-boards as he come back with a message. Whew! get a move on n front there.

Nearer and nearer they go to the quivering lights of the Hun. Looks as tho' we was really going to see the war now.

Where the devil's this 'ere front line? J'ever see such a bloody swamp. Reckon a shell or two must have dropped here. It's damn-all but mud and water everywhere, like the desert at Negilliat, only it's wet instead of dry.

Wish it was the procreatin' old desert, down you?
Not 'arf, mate!
Stop that laughing.

A young officer, yesterday a preparatory schoolmaster, the day before a schoolboy, yesterday a brother of sisters and a husband eloping with Honor the wide-shouldered—"Honor, are you asleep now?"—a young officer treads the duck-boards silently, with a hundred men in single file in front of him, and a hundred more behind. And they are silent now, these men. What are they thinking of, he wonders, each in the inescapable loneliness which is himself? God bless them, for good men.

Tony is in a soggy shell-hole with eight of his men. A ditch behind a low breastwork joins it to another hole where are ten more of his men and Sergeant Stott. Behind lies Childe Harold and all his men, in the luxury of a sand-bagged trench, some four feet deep and six bays wide. Heaven knows where Scrase has got to, and Moulden. Aylwin is somewhere in the darkness on his right. As for Hughes Anson and A Company, they are far away to the north. To judge from his operation map, the companies ought to be somewhere on the Steenbeek River, but who can say? The map is open on Tony's knees, and his head is bowed over it as he tries to study it in the dark. Useless: if he studied it for five hours he would never know where he is; he lost all sense of direction where the duckboards forked. And in this waste of slime how can one identify anything? If one lifts one's eye above the rim of the shell-hole one sees nothing in all the world except mounds and ponds and fens. Unless, indeed, those squarer shapes are the concrete pill-boxes behind the German Lines; and unless, miles and miles away, on the last ridge of all, one's imagination can sketch the spire of Passchendaele.

He has said, "So long, and good luck, Kit," to Scrase, with a shake of the hand; he has taken leave of Joe Wylie, whom he might have brought as orderly, but refrained from doing so because Joe had looked so old to-night; he has heard Hughes Anson's "Well, cheerio, Bungay, and all the best!"; and now he lays down his map to think of these friends. How white was Scrase's face as he gave his crisp

orders in Railway Wood! Only once before had he seen a face quite so ashen in its painless misery, and that was the face of an officer on Gallipoli who, under close arrest for unspeakable things, snatched a rifle and shot himself before the night was out.

Poor Scrase! the luck of war had served him ill. Probably in most men of good intellect and subtle, unresting imagination the war was breeding its master obsessions; Scrase had his, a horror which doubtless he could name no longer, nor describe, but only dread; and Tony had his too, a childish resolve to crush down a slander, two years old and half-forgotten and, in any case, exaggerated by himself beyond all reason. But—he saw it now for the first time—he was as lucky in *his* obsession as Scrase was unlucky. *His* was like an engine already throbbing within him, and waiting to drive him forward, contemptuous of death. Scrase's was like a round-shot shackled to his feet and his wrists. Just the luck of war: his peculiar obsession would probably *make* him; Scrase's would quite possibly destroy him.

It was getting lighter. From far behind the German Line the dawn was marching up, grey on the mist, towards the morass. Soon now! . . . Soon now! . . .

One's wrist-watch is no longer luminous, but one can distinguish the hands. A quarter to five. Dammit! three-quarters of an hour to creep by. Five-thirty is the zero hour.

He looks at the map again to read it in the growing light. He holds it up towards the east and where the enemy is; and he can see a pin-hole shining in it like a star. That pin-hole represents a foolish moment in the listless hours of yesterday, spent dawdling in Railway Wood. He had shut his eyes, swirled the pin round and brought its point down upon the map, saying, "If it punctures the map anywhere in the area of the battle, then that is the spot where I shall drop dead or wounded; if it falls outside, then I shall come through unhurt." It had pricked its hole directly on the Steenbeek River and he had thought, "What a fool I am!"

Only five minutes have gone by. One must do something. He goes to the next shell-hole on a visit to Sergeant Stott, and stays chatting with him and the men; but he catches an infection of nerves from them and is annoyed at the break in his voice which punctuates his speech now and then. It means nothing: he is not afraid. Conversation slackens;

and its suspended animation becomes uncomfortable. "Well, I'll see you again later on," he says cheerfully; but before the words could issue he had to swallow with difficulty.

Five o'clock. Perhaps our barrage will begin now. No, there is nothing but the fitful exchange of shell and small-arm fire, which always marks the watch at dawn.

Oh the devil! How leaden are the minutes, and why should one's knees and hands tremble when one is only excited, not afraid?

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

This absurd sentence—coming out of American history—is drumming in his head. It began in the first few moments of the barrage fire, which stunned them with its suddenness, and is now roaring overhead, beating all coherent thoughts, all fear, all wonder, all schemes and all memory out of one's pulsing brain. All coherence lost—so the sentence had begun: "All lost except honour. Business as usual." "All lost except honour. Business as usual." "All lost except honour. Business as usual." "All lost except——"

The barrage is creeping forward; and a wag cries, "O God help the Boche in his *awful* trouble!"; the morning is lighter. Hell! it's half-past five. A crescendo of machine-gun fire greets the zero hour.

They are out—slipping and sliding and bogged in the mud. Down. . . . Up again . . . and on—plunging on. "Come on! Come on! Come on!" It is Tony's own voice, and it sounds delirious in its excitement. The obsession is on the bridge, praise God. "Come on." Men are falling; but is it the mud or the bullets? One cannot know, for oaths and groans alike are drowned in the uproar of the guns. One fellow who has tumbled—poor simple slow imagination!—is pausing to wipe the muzzle of his rifle clean. "Come on, you fool!" Another is feeling in his hip pocket for a rag, as he stumbles on clumsily. How normal, under the flying roof of thunder, their movements seem! Tony slips again: can he recover his balance? no, he is plunging up to the elbow in the mud.

"Hit, sir?"

"No, Stott; this bloody mud. I'm all right now. Get on. Where in pity's name is this Boche line?"

Hope our direction is right; but we can only go on. Gosh! These shell-holes, hardly different from the swamp around,

must be the first German line! Look at the bodies in them! There's only one man alive. Don't shoot him: his hands are up. . . . Too late, poor b——, he's a goner. Is this our objective? But how simple!

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

Sergeant Stott speaks. "B Company's pushin' ahead, sir."

"Oh well, come on! Guess we shall soon be in Berlin at this rate. It's child's play. Christ! I've stopped one!"

"Bad, sir?"

"No, help me up; only a flesh wound in the arm, I think. You get on, you can't stay and dress it here. I'm coming too."

"Poor Fred Roberts, he's wounded, sir."

"Fred who? Roberts? Oh, can't help that; we must get on."

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

Machine-gun fire is raking them now, and the German bombardment. Splinters, hissing hot, impinge around them. Men are throwing themselves on their faces. Get up! Get up, you ——. Tony seems to be running forward alone. He turns his head and sees Sergeant Stott running after him, and a broken line of others with bayonets lengthening their rifles to disproportionate size—one of them is Willie Sparrow—Ah, stout lads! stout lads! What friends we are in this hour!

He flounders on, and turns his head once more, terror seizing him lest he be alone. The string of men is coming, though with wider gaps than before. Willie Sparrow is out of it. Wounded or dead, who knows? Is that his body huddled on its face? Can't help it. It doesn't seem very important which of the ninepins are skittled over.

"All right, sir. They're throwing up their hands."

A trench is in front—a pukka trench—and a few Germans are emerging above it with rifles laid down and hands upraised.

"All right, spare 'em. Don't bayonet them."

"Ah!" They are tumbling into the shallow trench, and they become aware of their own breathlessness as they sigh and pant. "One can rest here for a bit."

"Not . . . doing . . . too . . . badly . . . sergeant," pants Tony. "Got here . . . all right."

"Aye, soom of us. T'Company's dropped more'n fifty lads, Ah reckon."

"Can we get in touch with the other companies?"

"But you're wounded, sir."

"Only slightly."

"Got yer first field dressing, sir? Ah'll just be putting it on."

In the pause, while Sergeant Stott rips up his sleeve and dresses the wound, Tony remembers the existence of Scrase and Moulden, Wimborne and Aylwin. And he looks at his watch. It is not yet six o'clock.

Information comes to him of disasters on the right. Aylwin is seriously wounded, and his frustrated men are burrowing into shell-holes, half-way between the jumping-off place and here. As for the 13th Battalion beyond Aylwin (for C Company is the Right Flank Company of the 15th), their left has met with a terrific machine-gun fire—far worse than anything facing the 15th—and they are said to be scattered and leaderless, and retreating towards Railway Wood.

Tony, looking over his breastwork in the grey light of early day, sees out there on the right the square shape of a German pill-box, which is jetting a stream of fire towards the battle area of the 13th. Immediately that mercurial inspiration, which is partly the gift of his obsession, flushes his mind with the certainty that the capture and silencing of this pill-box is the job directly demanded of him, and the key-move for consolidating his own precarious hold, for enabling Aylwin's men to advance, and for effecting contact with those companies of the 13th which are still in being.

"We've got to take that pill-box, dammit!" he hears himself declaring to Sergeant Stott. "Now, by heaven, while their interest is the other way."

Jim Stott pales.

"D'you see, sergeant?"

Tratta-tat . . . tratta-tat-tat-tat-tat . . . spurts the pill-box.

"Aye. Yon pill-box," says Stott, and remembers that he must justify his rank of Sergeant. "Aye, Ah reckon that's the idea, sir. Coom on then, sir. Let's go and have a dekko at it."

"No, you stay here, sergeant, in case—in case someone has to take over the command of the platoon."

"Oh, Ah reckon Ah'll be coomin' along with you, sir."

"No, do what you're told, sergeant."

Tratta-tat . . . tratta-tat-tat-tat. . . .

Bombs. It is a job for bombs and a handful of men.

"You, Bray." "Yes, sir." "You, Donohoe." "Yes, sir." "You, Collins." "Right, sir."

Their "Yes, sir," wounds the heart. Damn, I'll go alone. . . .

No, I must have those who will follow me up, if I fall. We must bring this business off. It is the job . . . But God be good to them . . . save them.

"All ready? . . . wait for the word."

Back in an Aid Post Padre Quickshaw was working alongside of two doctors of the First Field Ambulance, Captain Sandford and Lieut. Clifton.

Quickshaw was up here in the Aid Post against orders. There had been the customary wrangle between the Brigadier and himself as to his proper post during a battle. The Brigadier, supported by the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain, had firmly asseverated that his place was down at the Ypres Convent, where there would be dying men to minister to, and dead to bury. In the underground tunnels of Railway Wood, where, God help 'em, the accommodation was tight enough without the addition of padres, pray where would he put himself if he went there? The Battalion Headquarters, in that particular sewer, were just about big enough to kennel a C.O., an Adjutant, and an Orderly Room clerk, while the Company Headquarters were less than room for a Company Commander and his platoon officers. No, padre, be reasonable for once, and get thee to the nunnery.

To all of this Quickshaw had retorted with the indignant assertion that his duty was to the living, not to the dead; and he went out from the presence of the Brigadier, the Brigade Major, and the Staff Captain, much as the Pied Piper went out from the parlour of the Mayor and Corporation of Hamelin. Such was his irritation he went straight up the Menin Road through the daylight, and swung angrily round Hell Fire Corner and clambered along the broken railway embankment till he reached the doorways of Railway Wood. Down one of the shafts he went, and along a tunnel to the door of the 15th Battalion headquarters. Peeping in here, he was glad to see Colonel Tappiter sitting alone at the table. It was his chance and he entered.

"The padre, hello!" Colonel Tappiter greeted him. "What's for you, padre? What have I done wrong?"

"Look here, sir." Quickshaw came straight to the point. "I don't want to sound highfalutin, or any balderdash like that, but if you'll let me, I want to go over the top with the 15th to-morrow."

The Colonel stared.

"*What!* Hell, no, padre! Don't talk like a damned fool."

"I never do, sir," grinned Quickshaw.

"You're doing it now. As a non-combatant you mustn't lead an attack—it's against some Geneva convention or other—and you mustn't even carry arms, so what the devil would be the use of you?"

"None whatever, as far as I can see," answered Quickshaw promptly, "but—er—the use comes afterwards, sir."

"Hum." The Colonel perceived his meaning. "But probably there'd be no 'afterwards.'"

Quickshaw averted his eyes: he so disliked what he was going to say because it might sound heroic. But, jerking his head angrily, he spat it out.

"Dead or alive, sir, the use would be there."

The Colonel was touched.

"You're a good fellow, padre; but no, you mustn't go. To put it bluntly, all the stretchers are wanted for combatants."

"But, sir"—Quickshaw, reverting to chaff, could face the Colonel again—"you are always telling us about Father Flinn of the Dublins who rushed out of the *River Clyde* and led them on to V Beach. After dinner sometimes you've been astonishingly fruity about it."

This was indeed a trap for the Colonel, and he escaped from it none too well, floundering out on a couple of jests. "Ah, but he was an R.C., old Padre. R.C.s are naturally picturesque, but not C. of E.s—no, Quickshaw, no—not C. of E.s. Besides, Irishmen follow their priests everywhere; Englishmen don't, thank the Lord."

"Damnably true," said Quickshaw.

"Our men simply wouldn't understand what you were after; they'd say it was swank."

Quickshaw thought a bit, and his glance fled away again. "As it works out in the army, sir," he said, "it's better for a padre to be accused of swank than of funk."

The Colonel touched his shoulder in a kindly way.

"Nobody's ever accused you of funk, Quickshaw; so that's your last excuse gone. No, you go off somewhere, and look after the dead and the dying."

"Oh *damn* the dead and the dying!" said Padre Quickshaw.

He left the Colonel and climbed a stairway to the Advanced Dressing Station of the First Field Ambulance, which was a bomb-proof dug-out on the ground level. To the officers here he offered himself as an extra orderly, and, being accepted, without further ado attached himself to them for rations and discipline. On the morning of the battle he went up with Captain Sandford and Lieut. Clifton to the Aid Post.

This Aid Post was in and about a derelict pill-box, on whose concrete walls and roof enormous red crosses were painted. Duck-boards coming in from the swamps ran to its entrance through an earth-walled ditch, and away again over the sodden ground to the Advanced Dressing Station at Railway Wood, where they met the comparative decency of Cambridge Road. Down the duck-boards, all these early hours, came an unbroken train of stretchers; moving quickly sometimes, and sometimes slowly, when there was congestion in front; and at other times waiting—waiting—while the blood soaked through their canvas and dripped to the earth.

"The whole of the 15th Royal West Essex seem to be coming down," grumbled Quickshaw.

A battalion which had marched up on its feet two hours before, was coming down now on its backs. In the Aid Post the two doctors and the padre did what they could for the wounded men, before sending them on to Railway Wood, where they would be tended again and transferred to the Potijze Road and the waiting motor ambulances. Aylwin came down among the other stretcher cases, and Childe Harold, both dying; and Willie Sparrow and Art Webster and Fred Roberts and hundreds more whose laughing voices have been heard in this history, but not their names.

They sounded every note in the gamut of pain; from the agony which could gasp no words, but thrust out the eye-balls instead, to a resignation which bade the mouth grin and joke, under eyebrows now frowning, now lifting. One of them, a boy not nineteen years old, was as terrible a sight as any Quickshaw had seen. His skin was not broken anywhere, and he was no more than a "Walking Case" led by a friend. But the shock of a shell, which had exploded near him killing all

the others in his hole, had changed the shape of his body as one might change the shape of a clay statuette by striking downwards upon its head: his head had sunk into his neck, and his chest protruded like a hunchback's; one shoulder had gone down to the level of his ribs, and the other up to his ear; his face, twisted to one side, was as staring and imbecile as a cretin's. And yet he was only a walking case—not a scratch anywhere, said the doctor, and not a bone broken.

"Pull yourself together!" Sandford shouted at him. "Pull yourself together!" but the boy apparently heard nothing, or heard only sounds of a voice miles away.

Sandford put his lips to the boy's ear: "Pull yourself together, you little idiot;" and he shook him brutally.

But still the boy only stared.

Then Sandford, to the amazement of all, slapped his patient violently on the cheeks, first with one hand and then with the other. The boy quivered under the impacts, but nothing more.

"Stand back, you fools—get back, can't you," ordered Sandford irritably; and as the men around retreated a pace, he clenched his fist, and swinging it round, caught the boy a sledge-hammer blow on the ear. The boy tottered, and an orderly caught him and stood him erect again: he was still only staring agape, like a half-wit.

"Useless. . . . Useless," Sandford sighed. "Take him away . . . poor kid."

Childe Harold came down with his face raked by splinters, his eyes blinded, and his breathing rasped by gas. He had no laughter now; he was too frightened for his eyes. "Tell me that I shall see again," he asked repeatedly. "Oh, tell me that I shall see again." He asked it of Clifton, of Sandford, of Quickshaw, and of the orderly.

"Oh that'll be all right," Sandford reassured him; but before the sightless face he was able to look at the others and convey, by a despairing shake of the head, that the boy was dying. "Keep your pecker up, old man. It's only temporary."

"Oh good!" rasped Harold. "Good. I'm glad of that. I just wanted to feel certain that I should see again."

They carried him out; and Sandford, having watched his going, sighed: "God! he needn't worry about his eyes, poor lad."

Fred Roberts was one of those who grinned. This man

whose sour grumbling, persistent as the burble of the stream, had entertained the battalion for three years ; who had grumbled on the march and in the billet at the end of the march—grumbled when ordered to go forward and fight, and grumbled when denied that privilege—this man, now lying on his stretcher with a chunk of shell in his thigh, only grinned his recognition at Quickshaw and made him a joke.

"This is the third I've stopped, sir. I stopped me first on December the nineteenth at Helles, and me second on June the seventeenth at Haverincourt, and here is me third. I got the two other chunks. The M.O.s give 'em to me and I give 'em to the missus to put on the mantelpiece. I'm glad I got me third, sir. I'm going to 'ave 'em painted red, white and blue and stuck in a glass case."

"I hope it will be your last, old man," said Quickshaw. "Three's enough."

"Oh, it'll be me last all right, sir. We fairly got 'em on the run up there. Our boys are doing prime. I reckon it'll be over by Christmas."

"*You* seem all right," said the doctor cheerily while he glanced at the wound. "Feeling perky enough, are you ?"

"Never better, sir—*wurl, that's* a bit of a lie, but I'm all right. I don't reckon much to that little chunk. Got used to them by this time. It's me third."

"Splendid. Well, we'll leave them to get it out for you at Railway Wood."

"Joo think they'll give it me, sir ?"

"Oh, yes, they'll give it you all right if you ask them."

"I'll say you said they was to, shell I ?"

"If you like."

"Thenk you, sir."

"Right-ho, my man. Good luck to you."

"Good luck to *you*, sir."

The stretcher-bearers lifted him up.

"Good-bye, Mr. Quickshaw."

"Good-bye, Fred, old man."

"*You'll* be coming soon, sir. It'll be over by Christmas."

And Fred Roberts was gone.

All this was before the Left Companies of the 13th broke and retreated in disorder. But now they were retreating right on to the Aid Post, and the doctors, becoming alarmed for its

safety, discussed a withdrawal to the Advanced Dressing Station at Railway Wood.

"Damn, no," said Quickshaw. "Why the devil are these men coming back? Can't someone reorganize them?"

"They've no officers left," said Sandford, who had been out to survey the situation.

"But they're messing up everything," grumbled Quickshaw.

"Granted," said Sandford.

"But what are they doing out there?"

"Mostly sitting in old shell-holes, and waiting for someone to bring them fags."

"Take 'em some playing cards," suggested Clifton.

"They've got sergeants and corporals, haven't they?" asked Quickshaw.

"I dunno." Sandford shrugged his shoulders. "It looks like demoralization."

"But dammit: we shall probably find the Aid Post behind the German Line instead of in front of it!"

"Exactly, padre."

"I'll go out and see what can be done. You get on with the bandaging. You do it better than me."

He went out, found a sergeant, and, after spluttering some of his resentment into his rather bewildered face, ordered him to collect all the other N.C.O.s he could find, and bring them into the lee of the Aid Post. To these he explained irritably that their disorderly withdrawal had endangered the Aid Post, and the M.O.s couldn't get on with their bandaging properly. He asked them where all their men could be got together again in comparative safety and reorganized. A sergeant suggested some old trenches and shell-holes near Wynbek Farm. "Well, bloody well go and do it," said Quickshaw, "and we'll get 'em back." The men were assembled, and Quickshaw, without listening to their grumbling, inquired of the sergeants what was the correct way for such a parade to advance to the battle, and what were the correct words of command. The sergeants providing these words, he shouted them, and led the men back along the duck-boards till they were out again in the exposed places, where he collected them in shell-holes, till he was sufficiently acquainted with the method of advancing in extended order, with bayonets fixed.

"But it's that there pill-box," objected a sergeant, pointing

to the pill-box which had been the objective of Tony's raid. "It was that one as did us all in before."

"Can't help that," said Quickshaw. "Pass the word they're all to advance when they see me advancing."

Two minutes later Quickshaw, with a fine wave of men behind him in extended order and bayonets fixed, was running across the open, one eye, it must be allowed, turning anxiously towards the pill-box.

It spoke not at all: it seemed as if dead. Only some distant German guns opened on them, and the shells burst wrathfully before and behind their advance, and the splinters hissed their repudiation. A few men fell, but Quickshaw went on.

He led the men right back into the battle and handed them over to a subaltern of the 13th, who was never more surprised in his life than when he recognized the Senior Chaplain of the Division as the leader of this dashing recovery. There was little time for congratulation, however, for the movement had been seen by the enemy, and five-nines began to crash about them, gouging up showers of mud and hurling their reek upon the air. Quickshaw, who had no more use for "crumps" than anyone else, having finished his task, ran incontinently back, floundering and slipping among the shell-holes, and quite indifferent to whether the men laughed at his "wind up" or heard his frequent detonations of irritability. He returned unhurt to the Aid Post, where he got on with his bandaging.

The pill-box had not spoken all the time. It had been a job for bombs. "All ready?" Tony had inquired of his handful of men. "Then come quick."

They were out. Tony knew not whether excitement was pounding at his heart or whether all emotional response had been deadened within him: both states seemed to be his in that crouching run from the trench's lip to the square shoulder of the pill-box. How was it possible that he was not seen? If they turned their jet of fire this way, he and all his party were dead men. The ground was kind to him; he did not slip much; perhaps he was picking his way with the instinctive delicacy of a somnambulist. But now they are seen! The fire is at them point-blank. One and another pitch with a groan, or, more awful, with a silence. He alone seems unable

to be hit. A blind rush, and he is behind the concrete flank of the pill-box. His heart pounds with terror now. Behind the pill-box, on its German face, there is a low orifice, not higher than the mouth of a large kennel, and it leads, as he knows from scores of other such strong-points, into a square cell measuring perhaps eight feet every way. In the fraction of a minute before he throws his bomb he sees faces—awful faces, never to be forgotten in this life—the white faces, transfixed with horror, of four or five Germans. One acute stab of pity for them shoots like a pain through his thinking; one second's debate, since their hands are up. "Should he risk a parley with them—but that might mean failure. For all he knows he is alone, and the rest of his party dead. No, he must succeed. This is the chance for which he has waited for years"—and as he thinks this, he sees Moulden talking to Aylwin and Childe Harold in their tent at Pelusium—"What with O'Grogan's unfortunate reputation——" *Damn, no!* the bomb pitches into that grey chamber.

He leaps aside, screaming "Look out!" to a man who is near. There is a loud explosion, and a fissure flashes like black lightning in the concrete side of the pill-box; his imagination instantly pictures that interior as it is now; and the picture rushes up to the captaincy of his mind, displacing the obsession for ever; and with it, his stomach seems to rush up into his mouth, and he is sicker than a poisoned dog.

The pill-box is silent.

"Occupy it, occupy it," he hears himself moaning—moaning like a dying child—as he lies, face forward, and retches again. "I can't go in. . . . No, *no*, I *won't!*—I can't. . . . Sergeant Stott. Fetch Sergeant Stott," he mutters.

CHAPTER VII

PASSCHENDAELE III

THAT moment, when Tony fell from a pole of excitement, and down through a sickness, on to a deadness of all emotion, a paralysis of will, a kind of shell-shock in which a blast of imagination had been the shell-burst—that moment he passed from being one man to being another; he changed from a boy rather bewildered at his exultation in war into a man dumbfounded by a blinding vision of its reality. When emotions began to fashion themselves into patterns again, he knew that all such childish things as a vindictiveness against Moulden, or a nursing of his wounded pride, or a desire that a few simple-minded companions should speak well of him, had died out of his mind, together with all vindictiveness against his country's enemies, even when they sinned; he seemed to stand detached from all passions in a loneliness of love and pity and pardon for all the world. As with a man who was selfish once but has been refined by long months in a sick bed, this attitude rested on a mental sickness which asked only stillness and silence and an empty peace; whose inarticulate voice was shaping the words, "Let me go. . . . Let me go away from this for ever. . . . Oh, let me go, and leave me alone."

Later he remembered Scrase and knew that he had experienced exactly what his friend had experienced two years before; he understood it now, and marvelled that Scrase could have carried on through all these succeeding months. Whether *he* would be able to carry on, and what would happen when he was asked to lead another attack he could not think, nor for the present did he trouble to wonder.

For his safety they dragged him into the pill-box, and he saw his handiwork. The sickness moved again, and his breath was short.

They were all speaking his praises and pressing his hand;

and Sergeant Stott was so moved with admiration as to be wet about the eyes.

Not yet half-past six, but the battle for that day was over. Its remaining events never outlined themselves clearly in his recollection; eleven out of its twelve hours seemed to have been spent in idle waiting in the pill-box. Somewhen at dark the companies were "pulled out"; and they filed back along the duck-boards to Railway Wood. Here there was the reunion of such of them as would meet again. No Aylwin, no Childe Harold; no batman for Moulden, Art Webster being an absentee; but Scrase was there, wounded in the hand, and Moulden, and Hughes Anson. The battalion which had gone into the battle nearly seven hundred strong numbered less than three hundred effectives now. Tony first met Moulden in one of the underground cells; and Moulden immediately came up to him with an outstretched hand.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I hear you've done wonders. No one's able to talk of anything else."

"Thanks," acknowledged Tony; and though he was grateful to Moulden for this exhibition of good sportsmanship, he knew, somehow, that it *was* an exhibition, unrelated to the man's true feelings; he sensed that Moulden, after much deliberation, had decided that this was the most impressive attitude to adopt, and, having fallen in love with it as a fine attitude, was trying his best to make it sincere, but without much success.

"I hope you get something jolly good out of it. A—a"—he had certainly been going to say "a V.C.," but the jealousy which was his true feeling resolutely refused an exit to the words —"a D.S.O. at least."

"Thanks, old man," said Tony; and didn't add that to-night he seemed to have crossed a bridge and gone miles away from such a curious emotion as hunger for the praise of men and their awards.

Then Hughes Anson burst in, shouting, "Well, how many of you lads are left? I hear Aylwin's got his packet; and Childe Harold, poor kid. Poor old Aylwin doesn't realize that he's finished, and he's giving detailed information of the battle to everyone he meets. Well, Bungay, you're the little hero of the day. My aunt! Going forward in the face of a heavy fire——"

"Precious little fire till the last second," corrected Tony.

"Oh, you shut your mug, and don't be the modest little hero. Going forward, as I say, long after you were wounded and in the face of a heavy fire—or in the earnest expectation of it, if you like—and capturing a whole hornet's nest of Boches practically single-handed, and slaughtering them all——"

"Oh, shut up," pleaded Tony, turning his face away.

"And slaughtering them all, and saving the whole bloody front, because it was that pill-box which had held up the advance—my aunt! (as I said before), its gallantry was only surpassed by its genius. It's a corking story, Bungay. It's epic, and I wish I had the wording of the recommendation to a V.C. I'd get it for you."

"*Are* they recommending him?" inquired Moulden—and there was anxiety in his voice.

"Well, if they aren't doing so, they ought to be."

"Of course," agreed Moulden, and the effort was a credit to him.

Hughes' voice dropped:

"Heard the yarn about Scrase?"

"No—what?"

But as he spoke Scrase entered. How ill he looked! The two-days' beard on his chin made whiter his white face, and deeper the lines across his brow and darker the shadows round his hollow eyes. A dirty blood-stained bandage wrapped about his right hand completed this picture of sickness. And about his manner there was something perturbing; a flushed, unreal gaiety, a noisy chattiness, that belied the restless wandering in his eyes and the breath-caught halt in his speech. And he had hardly stayed for five minutes talking thus feverishly to them, and explaining in unnecessary detail how a machine-gun bullet had scratched his knuckles, before his restlessness drove him out again. Hughes went to the door and looked along the dimly-lit gallery to make sure that he had gone from hearing. Then he returned and, with a significant look at Moulden and Tony, asked: "Did you see that hand of his?"

"Yes."

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't get your meaning, Rosy," said Tony.

Even Hughes the ruthless could not bring himself easily to tell the story. For once his eyes, seldom averted by diffidence from their steady gaze, sought the side wall of the little cell with its tapestry of sacking.

"One doesn't like to think it of poor old Scrase," he mutmured.

"To think what?" Moulden was keenly interested now.

"He bandaged that hand up himself and refused at first to let the doctor see it. Said it was nothing much; just a scratch along the knuckles."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Tony.

"The doc. insisted that it must be properly attended to, and when he saw it—well—he says the wound was never made by a machine-gun bullet, but by a revolver fired at close quarters. He declares that Scrase was over-anxious in his denial and swore black and blue it was a machine-gun bullet. The doc. didn't continue the argument, and of course he's playing the game and keeping mum about it, but the orderlies overheard, and"—Hughes shrugged his shoulders—"you can guess they'll soon be discussing it with C Company's men."

"Do you mean it's an S.I.?" asked Tony, dismay lowering his voice to a whisper. These letters, signifying "Self Inflicted," were branding letters, only to be uttered in a whisper.

"Yepp!" nodded Hughes with forced cheerfulness. "'Fraid so. And damn badly done too. The lad must be in a rotten state."

"Oh Christ!" Tony muttered, while Moulden looked too scared to speak at all. "Has the Colonel heard anything about it?"

"I think he's trying not to," laughed Hughes, mirthlessly. "It's too bloody awful in an officer."

"Can there be any doubt about it?"

"The doc. says not."

And now the restless Scrase returned, still wearing his uneasy rôles of talkativeness and gaiety. He announced that after three days' rest in Railway Wood they were probably going back to the line to attack again. "Isn't that fine? We're going back for two reasons: because we've suffered less than the other battalions, and because we're reckoned the best crowd of all. Did you know that? The old 15th are considered to be the lads. We're the Shock Troops of the brigade. How does that suit you? I hope you're satisfied."

"Oh, delighted, delighted!" Hughes assured him, instantly shedding his grimness of the minute before and donning his facetiousness of every day. "That means we've got three more whole days to live."

Moulden copied him.

"*I* don't mind," he said. "If we're not killed in three days' time, we shall be in three months, so what's there *to* it?"

"Quite," agreed the merry Hughes. "Absolutely."

"Quickshaw and Tono are the heroes of the hour," said Scrase, swinging off to another subject. "Brigade's recommending both for the D.S.O."

"Cheers!" exclaimed Hughes. "But why stop at the D.S.O.? What's wrong with the V.C. for old Bungay?"

And Moulden, satisfied that it was *not* the V.C., came out strong. "Rather! Why, it was the chance of a life-time to get a V.C. for the battalion."

"Quite," repeated Hughes. "Absolutely. And what you must do, Bungay, is this: now that you've got your D.S.O. you must work your ticket home. See? Do a guy. Yes, you 'op it, while the 'opping's good."

Tony produced a laugh. "Which is precisely what *you* did, isn't it, old man, when you got your M.C. nearly two years ago. Went straight home and withdrew from active hostility against the enemy, didn't you?"

"Oh, *me?*" Hughes said this as if he came in a different category altogether. "Oh, but you see, *I* enjoy it. My crikeys, I wouldn't miss a minute of it! No, I've no complaints. To the end of my life I shall always say it was a good war."

As they spoke Scrase had been turning from one to the other with the unintelligent stare of a man whose thoughts were roaming elsewhere. It was plain that he had hardly heard any of this, because he picked up the conversation at the point where he had left it.

"Ah, but you see old Tappiter doesn't recommend anyone for distinctions easily," he reminded them. "He thinks that what we do is no more than our duty——"

"Which is rot," said Hughes.

"And I don't believe he'd have forwarded Tono's recommendation to Brigade if he hadn't felt——" Scrase truncated the sentence, and took refuge in a cough.

"If he hadn't felt *what?*" asked Tony; while Moulden looked uncomfortable.

"If he hadn't felt that the case was exceptional," Scrase parried.

And during those three days of waiting Tony heard everywhere a like enthusiasm for his action. All those English public-school boys, who, copying one another like sheep, had traduced him behind his back, now executed an about-turn and followed their leaders into the last extravagances of praise. He perceived this movement very clearly, though it went on behind his back. He saw how the mutterings of detraction, which previously they had indulged, now served as additional fuel for raising high the flame of praise: to their romantic minds the story that O'Grogan had made good in glorious fashion after a failure on Gallipoli was a story not to be spoilt in the telling, with the result that they exaggerated his deed far beyond its worth.

In these later years of the war the recommendations for gallantry did not have to worm their way back to London through long days of travel, but were sent only a little way back—to Corps or to Army—and their acceptance or rejection was known in a few days. Before the 15th went back into the battle of Passchendaele it knew that Lieut. O'Grogan could put D.S.O. after his name. But of Quickshaw's recommendation it heard nothing, and throughout the battalion and throughout the whole brigade there were murmurings about a mutiny should it be denied him. Romantics all, they were as generous in their acclamations as they were ready with their censures, and as stubborn in the one as in the other. The padre must have his D.S.O. Of course. Good old padre! Hadn't he left his bandages to rally a retreating force and lead 'em in a dashing attack; hadn't he, padre though he was, saved the whole line by retaking an abandoned position; hadn't he, as you might say, saved the situation at a crucial moment and, for all they knew, won the war? Rather! and either you have your D.S.O., padre dear, or we go on strike.

They could not know what was happening to Quickshaw's recommendation. But it was enjoying an adventure of its own. Brigade had written a true account of the padre's "gallant action on the morning of October the —th"; and the little slip of paper went to Division, where, no doubt, it was endorsed, and from Division to Corps. It returned to Brigade immediately with the indignant retort that this officer, so far from being recommended for a distinction, should be at once recommended for a Court-Martial, his action being an offence against international law, inasmuch as he, a non-combatant officer, had

taken an active part in an assault upon the enemy. But, attached to this reply, was a smaller slip of paper on which the hand of a High General himself had pencilled :

" 1./Suggest that these papers be ' destroyed by gun-fire ' and the recommendation be worded differently ; "

and after this, the hand of Division had written solemnly :

" 2./Passed for your information and action please."

Brigade took action. The Staff Captain ceremonially shot the papers with his revolver in the meadow without his tent; and the Brigadier, the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain, after enjoying this ceremony, went indoors and spent an enchanting evening composing a description of Padre Quickshaw's "devotion to duty in his ministration to the wounded (and his refusal to desert them) on the morning of October the —th." They scratched their heads over this word and that, seeking always the most eloquent, and sometimes even demanding of the padre how such and such a word was spelt, while Quickshaw himself fumed about the room and spat abuse at their unheeding heads, but was not unhappy, one thinks. The revised recommendation was forwarded on a Wednesday, and on Friday a G.R.O. announced that the Distinguished Service Order had been awarded to the Rev. T. Quickshaw, Temporary Chaplain to the Forces (3rd class), for his devotion to duty in his unwearying ministration to the wounded.

The laughter of a whole Brigade was not louder than its cheers.

The Brigade laughed ? Not all, for this was after the third day and their return to the battle. And one of its battalions hardly existed any more. The 15th Royal West Essex was slain. Before the third night paled towards morning, they had gone back along the duck-board, three hundred strong ; and they did not see the noon. Only five of their officers and sixty of their " Other Ranks " trod the duck-boards coming home.

Tony had not gone with them. His good luck was watching

over him as surely as ill luck was dogging the heels of his friend. His right arm, though its wound was not severe and needed no more tending than an inoculation against tetanus and a daily dressing, had become stiff and painful; and the doctor, while permitting him to remain with the battalion, forbade him all use of it for a few more days. Tony was not sorry; nay, he felt like a man temporarily reprieved, for he had been racked with doubts and fears of himself, and, as for heroics, they only sickened him now. So, at three o'clock of the morning he had stood by a door-post of Railway Wood and watched the men file out into the darkness.

Hughes Anson passed first with A Company. He and his men were bright and cheerful, for Rosy had just committed his last unmorality. Perceiving the exhaustion of his men, and resolved that "my company's going to do best in this show. Don't they always, Bungay?" he had most deliberately stolen the jars of rum that belonged to the section of miners in charge of Railway Wood. For some days past he had rested a concupiscent eye on these lovely earthenware jars, where they sat hidden in the cell of the young O.C. Miners; and this night, while their guardian slept, he had burgled the cell on tiptoe and left his note-of-hand behind him: "So sorry, old bird, but our need is greater than thine." Then he had gone among his men, who were huddled and waiting in their burrows, and poured out for them the most generous rum ration ever issued in the British army; and they had pledged his health and long life, and he theirs. Hughes Anson was a sinner, undoubtedly, but never was an officer more loved by his men. And as he passed now towards the darkness, Tony waved "Cheerio" to him and Rosy waved back, and his last words were, "You can sell all my gadgets for the benefit of the mess. I always think that's the best thing to do with Deceased Officers' Kit, don't you?"

Then Scrase went by with C Company, and Tony pressed forward to shake his hand. And soon after came Moulden, and Tony shook his hand, too, and said, "All the best, old thing." Strange how completely his bitterness against this man was dead in him! He knew it was, because when he asked himself how he would feel if told, this coming day, that Moulden's gallantry had surpassed his own, and he was to be given the V.C., he could answer that he would be able to rejoice sincerely.

For Scrase his heart was heavy, as he turned back into the tunnelled quiet of Railway Wood. That tortured spirit who would not speak his pain, how one had suffered with him in the last three days! One had been compelled to meet his silence with the answering silence of a friend; but it had been misery—no less—to see that intellect which was once so fine and humorous, and so adult in its fearlessness, busying itself with the tricks of a sham happiness, and a sham impatience to be fighting again, that it might cover up the pitiable evidence of that wounded hand. Or had the impatience, perhaps, been real? Was Kit eager and trembling to get back into the fight that he might rebuild a reputation which his madness had overthrown? Was it *he* who had insisted on going back in spite of his damaged right hand; or was it Colonel Tappiter who had sent him? The Colonel had said (so the officers knew): "That little wound needn't prevent you directing your men. It may even impress them; and I want every good officer I can scrape together;" but Kit, returning from the C.O., had been careful to hint that it was only after loud insistence on his part that old Tappiter had permitted him to return to the battle. Poor Kit. If ever a man loved his friend, Tony loved Scrase in the hour of his collapse. So much so that now, sitting in the underground cell which had been C Company's headquarters, he fell to praying for Scrase, though the habit of prayer had long since fallen from him. "O God, help him. . . . O God, help him. . . . O God, make it all right for him." Once before surely, and very long ago, these same petitions had broken from him, for his own relief. When was it? Ah, he remembered. It was when they had told him, a boy of sixteen, that his father had deserted the family, and disgraced them all, and the story had stirred no anger in him, but only the intolerably vivid picture of his father's suffering. "O God, help him. . . . O God, help Kit. . . . O God, make it all right for him."

A noise of wrathful guns stayed this automatic prayer. It couldn't be the preliminary bombardment—not yet. The time? Only 3.30. Hastening up the nearest stairway to the surface of the world, he arrived at a door which looked over the moonlit wastes towards the jagged pattern of Ypres. From a dozen points behind that panorama of shadows the beams of searchlights were sweeping the night sky with its drifts of cloud, and wheeling and crossing one another in a slow and

stately measure, as they sought for the threat that sped, humming, across the darkness. The throb of that enemy aeroplane was plainly heard—a steady cyphering note among the explosions of the bombs and the bursts of anti-aircraft shells. And even as he watched, one of the spokes of light rested tremblingly on a chosen spot, and lo! there in the very crest and spread of its beam a golden dragon-fly vibrated on luminous wings; and all the other searchlights, perceiving that the enemy had been trapped at last, wheeled their shafts round, with the same unhurrying dignity, till they all converged on that one tiny glittering insect, as it dipped and pitched and twisted in a frantic effort to escape. But if it dipped, they dipped too; and if it swerved, they moved with it—slow, unhurrying, confident. And then the tracer bullets shot up the shafts of light and made a ruled line of luminous dots within the powdery brilliance of the beams, for these bullets were lamps. There was a roar of other aeroplanes climbing to meet the enemy—but they would not reach him. He was heading fast for home, and if he eluded the bullets and the shrapnel, he would carry his fluttering heart into the safety of the German skies. He defeated them; he passed out of the searchlights' reach, and his escape was almost a relief. One by one the searchlights veered back; and the night was quiet again.

Tony walked to the top of the hump which was Railway Wood. He was troubled because the beauty of the spectacle just concluded had filled him with delight, notwithstanding all that had happened in the last days. When would he solve the problem of the dilemma in his nature between his rational hatred of war and his emotional exultation in it? Never, probably. Until that moment by the pill-box when reason had leapt to the throne and expelled all elation, he had *enjoyed* the war! Explain *that*, who could! And there was still—even now—a part of him which drew a keen enjoyment from the war before his eyes. He was persuaded that he was not in essence different from most men, only more aware of his emotions and more introspective, and yet beyond denial he could experience an intense æsthetic pleasure in the beauty of the Fact of War. And he could see that this pleasure was something different from a mere youthful thrill in war's excitements; something different from a keen delight in the fine and lovely deeds that war enabled men to perform; it was —as he could only repeat again and again—a deep appreciation

of the beauty of the Fact of War. To those who could look at the Fact only with their reason this pleasure must seem either foolishness or indecency; but to those who, standing in the detached position of the artist and placing an irrelevant morality aside, could observe it with a purely æsthetic eye, had it not its own sublimity? Why, look: as he stood here on this higher ground and saw the vast wilderness of the Salient outspread before him, with all its harrowed mud-scape glistening beneath the moonlight—the ringed water in its shell-holes, and the long melancholy tarns reflecting the sky—and never anywhere a sign of life, but, all around, an horizon just luminous with morning, why, he was ready to swear that it was at once as terrible and as beautiful a thing as he had seen, or would ever see. Perhaps, as sometimes he had suggested to Kit, Beauty had nothing to do with human pains and human values, but wherever there was perfection, it was there; and this was the perfection of desolation. It *must* be beautiful, or why should he be feeling now that he would give his soul to be able to capture it for ever on a painter's canvas or in a poet's words. Why should he be wanting to possess it in some form for ever? Oh, he would never be able to solve the problem; he could only feel it and admit it honestly; but that it was the subtlest of all the problems which they must elucidate who would seek to drive war from men, he knew as he stood here on the hummock of Railway Wood.

A few shells flew overhead and burst on the German line. Doubtless the guns were ranging before the barrage opened. 4.30. What were Scrase and the others feeling now? O God, help them. . . . O God, help them. . . .

It was cold, bitterly cold; and he had rushed up to watch the air raid without his British Warm. He returned to Railway Wood, and lay down on the table in the empty headquarters of C Company. Soon he was asleep, though half-aware in his dreams of the world palpitating overhead with barrage and counter-barrage.

When he awoke it was eight in the morning, and he heard that the battalion was wiped out: Hughes Anson was dead, Moulden was dead, Sergeant Stott was wounded and dying, and Scrase under close arrest for cowardice in the face of the enemy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEBRIS I

TONY walked along the road, westward from Proven. He was going to find Quickshaw. Tony was the officer "responsible" for Captain Scrase and must not, in the ordinary way, quit the prisoner's side, but he had been granted at his earnest request an afternoon's relief, and another officer had taken over his watch in the room at Proven. He had found it intolerable sitting in a room with Kit, while the hours passed and the chances and the hopes. He had fretted to be outside, setting forces to work to save his friend. The whole of his thought, in these hours, was bent towards the saving of Kit. Kit with a firing party in front of him and a wall behind—no, *no;* not that! But what could he do; to whom could he turn? He was an infantry subaltern, which meant that his friends had all been brother officers in his own battalion, and now these men were dead—or dying. Colonel Tappiter was still there, but the Colonel was chafed and haggard just now, and very rude and unapproachable. All of the old batmen too—all were gone; except Joe Wylie. Tony could think of one friend only—Padre Quickshaw—and, though he could not see that the padre had any power at all to influence the forces moving to the destruction of Kit, he was hurrying towards him—because he had no one else to hurry to.

He found Quickshaw at No. 201 Stationary Hospital, where he was resident for a few days, not as a patient, but as a visiting chaplain. But he looked ill enough to be a patient, thought Tony. This was the first time in the two and a half years of their acquaintance that Quickshaw had looked really ill. A small worn figure, with worried face and thinning hair, he had always been; but now an utter exhaustion seemed to have shrunk him into something still smaller and more worn. All knew that for the last fortnight Quickshaw had slept perhaps

six times, and then for no more than a spell of two hours: every night he had been in the dressing stations and every day he had spent writing the letters and attending to the business of the hundreds of men for whom he had promised to act as executor. It was at Railway Wood that the brigade added to its everlasting jest, "I'm going to be a padre in the next war," the rider, "Yes, but not a Quickshaw, dammit."

Tony was so shocked at his drained, depleted look, that he remarked on it before anything else.

"You look as though you ought to go sick yourself," he said; a suggestion which Quickshaw repudiated with a word that may not be told.

Quickshaw answered little to the tale which Tony related. He had not heard it before; because the 15th were holding tight to it, and so were Brigade and Division, and Quickshaw had not been near Brigade since the battalions were withdrawn from the battle and sent to "rest" in the fields and farms around Proven: he had preferred to "stand by" those men of the Royal West Essex who were lying in this hospital. And now when he heard it he said little; only his fish-like eyes came further than usual out of his head, and his lips emitted an oath; and presently he added the reflection (which didn't seem very sensible) that it made him want to tear off the ribbons of his M.C. and D.S.O. and throw them away. Not a word of condolence could he produce for his visitor, nor did he extend towards him the hand of a friend. It was an odd kind of sympathy, but it was very satisfying to Tony.

After a long embarrassed silence his first words were, "There are a hell of a lot of Canadians in this hospital."

"Are there?" said Tony.

"Yes: they seem to have been doing big things up yonder. I'm beginning to think they're some of the best troops we've got."

"Are they?" said Tony.

"Yes. . . . I don't suppose they're any braver than the Australians, but they haven't the bounce of that lot—they haven't the 'We're-the-only-boys-who-can-fight-and-you-Imperial-lads-are-too-gentle-by-far' sort of thing. I've not much use for that brand of bunk."

"Of course not," Tony agreed. "But only a few of them talk like that."

" Perhaps . . . Yes. . . . There are a lot of Canadians in this hospital, and they're some of the best we've got," mused Quickshaw.

The thought passed through Tony that they must indeed have been good to earn a superlative from Quickshaw.

" He'll die," continued Quickshaw.

" What ? "

" He'll die. I'm afraid you must resign yourself to it."

" Oh no, he can't—he mustn't—we——"

" But he will. The case'll pass from the hands of those who knew and understood him into the hands of a lot of mechanical-minded old legalists—God ! haven't I seen it before ? "

" But Tappiter'll send up a tribute to his character, and so will Brigade."

" Paw ! do you suppose there's been one in a hundred F.G.C.M.s when the C.O. hasn't said the best he could for the prisoner ? And yet they've shot two hundred men so far. How can they spare an officer ? Their very sense of fair play won't let them do it. Yes, it's their very virtues that'll kill him. . . ."

Tony was silent, for his heart had sickened : if a heart can feel white, his heart was white then.

" Why, the Brigadier was blowing off the other day," proceeded Quickshaw, " because a strict order had been issued that if any officer gave the word to retire, his brother officers were to shoot him. I said, ' Right-ho, General. I'll remember that order, and as soon as you give the word to your brigade to retire, as you'll have to do before the Germans have finished with you, I'll shoot ; ' and when I said that, the dull-witted old ass seemed to see the reality of the matter for the first time. Scrase let his men go over the top without him—No, I wouldn't give a thank-you for his chances."

" But you'll do all you can for him, won't you ? "

" Of course," spurted Quickshaw. " What do you suppose ? "

" Thanks. . . ."

The subject, as was best, went aside and out of view.

" I suppose you know," began Quickshaw, his tone indignant, as if to imply, " and if you don't know, you ought to," " that practically all the men of your battalion who are not dead and buried already are here in this hospital."

"No," said Tony. " I didn't know it."

"Well, then they are," said Quickshaw, almost contemptuously.

"Can I see them?"

"Course you can. Most of them are in the Dangerous Wards."

"Oh . . . I'll go and see them."

To all Englishmen—and Tony was English in this—a visit to the sick in hospital is a difficult and uncomfortable enterprise; and these last words of Quickshaw's did not make the prospect any easier for him. With fear at his heart he asked diffidently:

"Are you coming too?"

"Hang, no!" said Quickshaw. "You can find them out yourself, can't you? The orderlies will show you round."

"Right-ho."

And Tony went off alone.

No. 201 Stationary was a city of Army huts disposed in long lines, between which ran straight roads mapped by white stones; and each road supported at its entrance a notice board which bore a letter of the alphabet. An orderly, on being stopped and questioned, answered that the L line, with its huts L 1, L 2, L 3, and L 4, formed the "Dangerous Wards"; and to the L line, therefore, Tony went, with his heart fearful. Among the names on a Roll shown him by a sergeant who was smoking a cigarette at the entrance to L 3, he found those of Private Sparrow and Private Webster. He stood outside a while, raising the courage to enter.

It was sunny outside; and when he passed into the hut, the change into its dimmer light was so marked that for a few seconds he could distinguish little. He was aware of a clean and pleasing smell of iodoform, and of the buzzing of a late fly or sleepy wasp. The quiet in the ward was remarkable: it seemed as if the occupants of the cots were all asleep. The responsible orderly, standing by a table laden with drugs in varying bottles and with dressings of lint and cotton wool, came forward and greeted him in a whisper—he would have spoken very differently in a livelier ward.

Tony, feeling that a whisper was incumbent on him also, inquired after Private Sparrow.

"Sparrer? Oh, yes."

The orderly compressed his lips despairingly, and shook his head. "He's in the bed in the corner, sir. You can see him if you like."

"Thanks."

Tony went towards the bed. Willie Sparrow lay there asleep; his body, angular with wasting, rested supine, allowing the figure to be outlined beneath the blanket, but his head was turned so that his cheek lay upon the pillow. His face, a smooth one over which no razor had ever passed, looked towards the wall. So small had his frame, spare at the lustiest, become, that it might have been the body of a delicate child. Suddenly conscious that a visitor was looking down at him, he turned his face from the wall and opened upon Tony the startlingly bright eyes of the dying. It was a moment of acute discomfort for Tony. He offered those so-difficult remarks which one offers at bedsides and which seem always so awkward, inadequate and unreal. But the conversation, ill-begun, gathered vitality. A question had been trembling behind the boy's eyes all the time he spoke, and at length he put it, with a touching politeness:

"Excuse me, sir—I suppose there's no harm in asking—but am I going to die?"

"No, no," answered Tony instantly, and with an acted laugh. "Of course not. We'll soon get you well."

"No, sir, but *really*—honestly—I'd rather know."

Tony kept silence; and Sparrow continued:

"I don't *want* to die, sir. . . . Oh, I don't. . . . You see—if you can understand—I feel quite well in myself. It's only a wound, and not any weakness of my own. If only I can get over this, I shall be as strong as anything. . . ."

"*You* won't die," said Tony. "That's all right, old man. Don't you worry about that."

"No, *please*, sir. I—I don't want just to be comforted. . . . For a lot of reasons, I'd rather know the truth. I was brought up religious—there's that—and—I want to write some letters, if it's really all up with me. . . . They won't tell me, sir, but I know—I feel. . . . I should think it a real favour, sir, if *you* would tell me the truth, sir."

Tony did not answer. How could he?

And the boy said again, putting out his hand and touching his officer's: "I mean it, sir."

Tony gulped, and then answered, "Well, sonny, what do *you* think about it?" and offered no further word. But he brought his other hand so that now he held the boy's in both of his.

Private Sparrow stared up, sighed, and said, "Sir, I suppose I am."

"I'm afraid so, lad," said Tony.

The moisture formed around the boy's eyes, but he only added, for his words all through had been as simple as a child's, "Yes. I think I really feel like it."

"Well," said Tony, sitting down upon the bed, "what about things?"

The boy, staring up, left the answer of this question to Tony, who reminded him that Padre Quickshaw was in the hospital.

"I know, sir," said the boy. "He's been very good to us."

"Well, shall I——" began Tony, and conquered his diffidence and continued: "would you like him to have a little Communion service for you here?"

"Oh, I *should*, sir!"

"I'll get him for you. I—I'll go now."

And rising, perhaps glad of an excuse to do something rather than to speak, he walked towards the door, but not three steps had he taken before a voice—a hoarse and breathless voice—stopped him.

"Mr. O'Grogan, sir."

It was Art Webster, in the bed on the other side of the ward.

"Hallo! I was going to look for you next," laughed Tony. "Well, how's things?"

So he asked laughingly, but his heart was twisted at the sight of Art Webster. No doubt about Art Webster: he was further along his road than Willie Sparrow.

"I 'eard what you said to Sparrer, sir," he breathed out hoarsely. "I—I——"

"Yes," encouraged Tony.

"Well, I ain't never bin confirmed, sir, but if you've no objection, I don't mind tyking the Sacrament along of Willie Sparrer. O' course if you think it'd matter my not havin' bin done, well then there's nothin' to it—but I'd like to, if——"

"Why of course, of course you can," smiled Tony. "I'm sure of it."

"I always had a mind to be done," explained Webster, to justify himself further.

"I'm going now to the padre, and I'll ask him."

"Yes, and if the gen'l'man says no, it won't matter, sir; and thenk you all the same."

"Ah, but he won't, he won't."

Nor did he. When Tony put Webster's question Quickshaw retorted: "Of course he can join in. What does he suppose?"

It was an hour before Quickshaw could get to the ward, so Tony returned to Sparrow's bedside, and wrote some letters for him at his dictation. There was one to his mother in which a word was said about "being quite happy;"—and be it told here that about a week later a letter written in an unfamiliar hand reached Tony in a ruined cellar at Nieuport: it was from the mother, and in it she said something about "having been good to her boy" and ended with the words, "I used to pray night and day that he might be sent back to me alive, but now that I can no longer do that, I am praying that God will allow you to return to your friends in safety."

Quickshaw came and set up his little table with its linen cloth, and invited the other men in the ward to join in the service if they cared to. He asked them almost rudely, in a tone that suggested, "If you want to, you can; and that's all there is to it. I'm not going to beseech you to do it;" but they understood; and many nodded their willingness to take a part So he tossed his stole over his neck, and began the service, reading it with a sharp perfunctoriness—rather quickly and angrily—as if he were empty of emotion, or even hostile to it. But the men knew him better.

Tony knelt on the matting of the floor, the only member of the congregation who was not under sheets. And he told himself, that, believing or not believing—or, rather, believing with his heart if not his brain—he would receive the Sacrament with these his men, and as humbly as they. His heart was near to breaking; and Reason, the cold denier, was dissolved away in the pity and love which broke from the wound. Blindly believing, he would "stand in" with Webster and Sparrow in this last Sacrament before they went out of the daylight into the mystery. And in the same blind trust he would pray for Scrase. He *must* pray for him. What was Doubt against such a need to pray? Something like a joy sprang from this resolve to deal again with the things of God; and as Quickshaw's voice ran on, an old longing swelled in him—the old irrational longing to give himself to God, and to the world, as a priest. He remembered an experience of

years before, which had come to him in a dull railway carriage, after Peggy had gone out of his life on the arm of Michael Saffery her husband; and that experience was upon him now, but even more strongly. Highly sensitized always, but this afternoon more than ever, to the loneliness and the transitoriness of all living people, he knew in this moment, with a terrible poignance, that nothing mattered except to love as many of them as possible, to serve them, to draw them closer and closer to him and to one another with bands of love, and to do this work quickly, for the night came apace—and all this painted but one picture: the picture of a priest. They were coming to him again to-day with their winning appeal, those who had loved the whole world and laboured for it: St. Francis, St. Aidan, the Blessed Curé d'Ars, Father Damien, and some of the clergy he had known in his father's days. These, the selfless, were the happy men. All petty little selfish and personal loves, were they not marred by faint frustrations, or by their transience? There was even a frustration in his love for Honor—if only he would face up to it. Oh, to be able to lift this need of loving into a love for God and for the whole world! To be able to abdicate from reason, or to compound with it, and obey a cry in his nature!

What a call to priesthood may be, who knows? But this perhaps was the far-away note of a call to Tony, as he knelt by his dying men.

In the next ward, L 4, lay Sergeant Jim Stott. Jim Stott, lying on his bed, was very different from the boy Sparrow, whose flesh had left him before his life. A fever burned in Jim Stott, but it had been powerless to reduce his generous substance. When Tony entered the ward, Jim was lying upon the outside of his bed, naked except for a girdled towel, and displaying a huge figure fashioned of firm flesh and covered with a fair skin. This hospital was accounted too near the shells for sisters to be allowed there, and it fell to a tall and burly R.A.M.C. corporal with a forearm better suited to a sledge-hammer to try by bathing head and body and limbs to reduce the temperature of the fevered man. With the utmost gentleness this burly corporal was passing a sponge up and down the great hairy chest, the stomach strong with muscles,

and the sinewy limbs of his patient. In power and ripe manhood these two, the sufferer and his nurse, were a pair. Tony came and stood by them.

"He was my sergeant," he said to the corporal.

Jim Stott, in his delirium, did not recognize him; he was crying out, as the sponge passed up and down him, incoherent things about wounded and dying men. And the corporal accompanied his bathing by soothing and humouring words.

"We're making you better to send you home," said he, never stopping his stroking action.

"Can't tha get the wounded in afore they die?" cried Sergeant Stott.

"We've got 'em in," the corporal assured him, "and they're doing fine."

"Eh, but not all. Not all," the delirious man confidently affirmed. "Ah can see soom there."

The corporal turned to Tony and explained.

"'Tisn't only the fever, sir, that does it. His wits seem to have gone. He's packing up all right."

Tony touched the patient and inquired whether the bathing was making him feel better. A flash of reason seemed to enlighten him and, after staring at Tony with a bewildered look, he answered, "My head's hot and Ah see things."

"That'll be all right soon," said the corporal, and pressed his sponge on the burning forehead.

"It's no good, sister," replied Sergeant Stott, thus paying a blind tribute to the gentleness of his nurse. "Tha'd better let me die. Eh, you can't stop it, lass; they're there still. . . ."

It is enough. The figures of Private Webster, Private Sparrow, and Sergeant Jim Stott have been presented here as those of simple men who, once upon a time, upheld the state for you, and have a claim upon your regard. Here and here did England help you.

CHAPTER IX

THE DEBRIS II

THERE is a farm near Proven behind Poperinghe, where how many battalions have rested, going up at full strength with their bayonets sharpened and their junior officers in privates' kit to take their part in the Salient, and how many have halted on their backward journey, thinking of friends who were in these rooms and barns when last they rested here, it might be possible for archives to show; and the exact number of voices, too, that must have echoed in the brick-paved rooms of its farmhouse, before going onward to be quieted in the mud, this might be worked out by an auditor with a genius for figures; but of all the myriad closeted emotions suffered there by these pilgrims—emotions that were never brought out from behind their curtains of laughter—it is forever beyond the arithmetic of man to make the tally. Doubtless the Flemish farmer and Madame his wife work there now; and to their honest peasant minds, hard and dull, the impregnated walls whisper nothing; when after a laborious day they take their tired bodies to that room upstairs to sleep, their dreams, if they dream at all, are not troubled by the scenes which the room has witnessed; they know nothing of Captain Scrase and Lieut. O'Grogan, and Colonel Tappiter and old Joe Wylie; nor of a shot that was fired here, years and years ago. And that smaller room which opens off this one, and whose door is probably always closed since it holds nothing but lumber and boxes, there Joe Wylie piled his kit and stood his rifle in a corner and cooked a meal for his officers. In the room just across the passage Scrase slept when he was under close arrest, and Tony by his side, as the officer in charge of him. This room itself where, as we conjecture, the farmer and his wife sleep to-day, was no more than their place of messing, for there was ample accommodation—only too ample

—in the farmhouse and the barns and the tents beyond the midden for the 15th Royal West Essex when they came back from the battle of Passchendaele, not a hundred bayonets strong. Battalion Headquarters had the ground-floor rooms, and the arrested officer, and Tony his guardian, were lodged—one had almost said " secreted "—in these rooms upstairs.

A late October day in Passchendaele's year; and Scrase stood staring out of the window at the level plain with its blown poplars, and at the line of sodden tents which flapped on the trampled mud, just beyond the midden, and at the glimpses of other tents arrayed about the meadows behind the screening trees. Perhaps he was thinking that this was the Belgium land for which he had come to fight. Perhaps he was remembering that these were the Flemish Netherlands where so often the English had pitched their tents and perished, and that the years would pass, and a death in 1918 didn't matter very much. The rain of a whole day had ceased, and the clouds, breaking, had let the sun through. The birds were spangling the evening with their bright notes.

He stood watching and listening. He wore no belt; but Tony, who stood behind him staring at his back, wore his Sam Browne across his breast like an officer on duty. One would have supposed that after a battle which had wrecked them, so that they were but flotsam on the high-water sand, they would have let the past go down with the wreck; but no, the Demiurge of War is not a man that he should pity, and his craftsmanship goes on: one wore a belt and the other did not.

" Kit," said Tony.

There was no answer.

" Kit."

Scrase heard, but seemed hardly interested: without turning round he mumbled, " Er? "

" You've got to be ready to go down the line with me in about an hour," explained Tony. " After the battalion's moved off."

Then Scrase turned round. His face was deathly pale and thin, as if thought had exhausted him as much as any disease; and the same exhaustion had emptied his wrists, which were attenuated and blue-white. He assumed, however, a laughing manner.

" Court-Martial, I suppose? "

Tony muttered a low affirmative.

"Well——" Scrase shrugged his shoulders—"that's the end of me, I suppose."

Tony, his intellect beaten to dullness, could only answer feebly: "Why fear the worst?"

"What can prevent it?"

"The M.O.s might put up a case for you."

"Ah, but there's nothing wrong with me, Tono," laughed Scrase—"nothing that doctors can find. They can't see a man's will, and explain what happens when it suddenly ceases to work."

"They might put up some sort of—er—mental plea."

"But confound it, Tono, I've never been so clear-brained in my life. I seem to be seeing everything in the whitest possible light." He sat down on the edge of the table and crossed his legs. "And one thing I see very clearly, and it is that there's no explaining my case to a court of simple-minded old regular officers."

"But, Scrase, old man——" Tony walked up and down before continuing—"try and explain it to me. If they'll let me I want to act as your Prisoner's Friend."

"It's useless, Tono. You can't explain the gradual doubting of every decent principle under the sun and the loss of all purpose that results from it, and—my God!—the horrid acceleration of the heart, in those awful moments when your brain shows you with merciless clearness what such despair means. Can you explain *this*: that when I stood in that shell-hole before our attack, I told myself I would go over the top all right—and why not? I wasn't afraid—I cared too little—pooh! I wouldn't have minded if I'd been shot in the first seconds—but—but when the moment to advance came, my body didn't move. It simply didn't obey my will; it was as still as a clock when the spring's gone. The men went over, and five minutes later I was still there, and I sat in the mud and cried with disappointment. Can you explain that?"

Tony turned away his face, too miserable to answer.

"I can only plead 'guilty'; and, Tono, isn't it funny, I'm not the least afraid of the firing party. I can think of it as vividly as I like and I don't turn a hair."

"Oh don't!" pleaded Tony. "Don't talk as if it were certain."

"Of course it's certain. And I don't mind. At least, I don't mind going out. All that worries me is the thought of

my people knowing the truth, and the men knowing. Gosh it'll hurt the Alderman my father! If you knew him, you'd see why. He's a Tory of the Tories, and a typical City Father——" Scrase smiled at the picture—"I need say no more. By the way, do the men know?"

"They know you're under arrest, I suppose, but I don't suppose that they need know the—the issue."

"But these sentences are published in General Routine Orders, aren't they?"

"I suppose so," Tony agreed, and fumbled for his cigarette-case to gain time; "but——" he let the cigarette-case stay where it was—"but don't you think that, with the battalion moving off like this into a new sector, and a new army, the—the story may never reach them?"

"I *don't*, Tono: I'm not such a fool. It'll be too rich a story. . . ."

"Nonsense, old man. They may never even know whether you were court-martialled or not."

"What about the men whose testimony'll be taken?"

"I—well—but no one's been warned yet." It was a poor answer, and Tony's heart registered its poorness by a sickly slowing. How could he compete in argument with Scrase, whose brain was moving as perfectly as his own was lumbering, if not stopping altogether? "And . . . and, Kit . . . there are not many of the men left who knew anything about you, are there?"

"No. One can almost be glad of it."

"Then again, if the rumour's true, we're going miles north, into the Nieuport sector."

"Yes—Nieuport—and it's quiet there," said Scrase, his eyes wandering with his thoughts away. "You'll all have leave. . . ."

Tony gave no answer. His brain, defeated by simpler things, could not deal with this.

"Don't you think, Bungay," asked Scrase smiling, "that after they've passed sentence of death on a man, they should grant him a Last Leave?"

"Oh don't! . . ." It might have been Tony who was the sufferer, and Scrase the comforter. "The worst hasn't happened yet."

Scrase grasped his knee and whistled a few bars quite merrily. "No, but it's inevitable." He whistled a few more, while

preparing his next words: "Bungay, I've something to ask you. If the opportunity were to occur for me to—well, if by accident you were to leave your revolver on the table—would you explain to the Colonel that I didn't do it out of funk, but out of consideration for the regiment? He's a romantic old devil at heart, and he'd understand."

"You mustn't talk like that," murmured Tony.

"Seems a damn sensible way to talk," answered Scrase, lifting his eyebrows humorously. "It would stave off the disgrace to the regiment of a published conviction; it might even, as you suggest, be kept from the ears of the men so that they would never know what happened to me; and it would undoubtedly go quite a long way towards rehabilitating my name with the few who would know, for this funny old army is really as romantic as it can be, from top to bottom, as you've often pointed out, old Tono. No, it seems to me a great idea. And then . . . they would let it go through as 'Killed in Action,' which I confess would be a great relief to me. I know they would. I remember just such a case on Gallipoli. . . . Will you promise, then?"

"I promise nothing. You mustn't talk like this."

"Doesn't really matter if you promise or not, old man, because if it happened, you couldn't help telling the Colonel of this conversation. And he'd understand. I can even imagine its rather appealing to him, if you told him that I said it wasn't cowardice which made me do it but—well—atonement, if you like." He smiled at his words.

"We're talking nonsense," Tony protested. "I'm certainly not going to leave my revolver about."

"I might run," suggested Scrase, with eyes still smiling, "and then you'd have to shoot. . . . But I don't want to do that. I don't want to be shot running, or by another hand."

"Oh, shut up, old man," Tony begged.

From the passage outside came Joe Wylie bringing two mugs of tea.

"There was some tea goin' downstairs, sir, and I thought you gen'l'men might like a cup. The men 'ave 'ad theirs, and are being fell in, and the Colonel and the Adjutant's gawn to march 'em off. It's quite lonely dahn there." His next words were for Scrase. "And 'ow are you feelin' nah, sir? Several of the men arst after you, and kindly, sir."

"What did you say to them?" Scrase inquired.

"I said you was proper ill, that's all. I said, 'I expect "es for 'awspital.'" By now Joe had placed a mug of tea on the table by the side of Scrase and given the other to Tony, who had walked away with it towards the window. Joe did not seem anxious to go, but stood with one hand twisting a button on his jacket. "Well, now, sir—by the by, sir—did I ever tell you this one? Did I ever tell you 'ow——"

"Don't tell us now, Wylie," Scrase interrupted, laughing again. "Tell us later."

"Here's the Colonel coming," Tony warned.

"O my Gawd!" exclaimed Joe in a deliberately comical panic. And he fell to a panicky tidying of the room. A little comedy, a little jollity, was all the ministration he could offer to the pain in the room; and he wanted to offer something. "The Colonel—Gawd help us! 'E's comin' up 'ere, you bet. . . . 'Ere, 'ow much time 'ave we got, sir?"

Scrase's thoughts seemed to return from straying. "Er—what did you say, Tono?"

"The Colonel's coming across the fields. He's coming here, I think."

"Oh, I—I'd rather not see him, unless I must. . . . I'll —I'll go in the other room and—yes, I can be packing."

Forgetful of Wylie he went out hurriedly, crossed the passage and closed his door.

Joe heard the door shut and turned towards his officer. "Don't it proper do you up, sir, to see him like that?"

"Yes," agreed Tony.

"I suppose he realizes he's *for* it all right. Gaw! what on earth must he be thinking? . . . Does it seem quite fair to you, sir?"

"In what way?"

"It don't to me, sir. Ahter all, what's 'e done? Bitten awf a bit more of the poker than he could chew, that's all, sir. With a headpiece like his, he ought to 'a' bin a Staff Officer; then he'd 'ave 'ad a nice cushy job. But he chose to be with the Infantry—the boys that are getting on with the war—and he's stuck it aht long after he was a doner, and gaw lummy, sir! if you arst me, a feller that takes on a tough job and messes it up in the end may be as good a feller as 'im that takes on a soft job and gits through with it."

"Surely, Wylie," agreed Tony.

"Yes, and I mean: I admire 'im for it, because you never caught me takin' on the 'ard job if there was a soft one going. Nah, not on your life!"

"But you joined the Infantry, Joe," Tony represented, "when you might have joined the A.S.C. or something?"

"Yes, but jest to be along of some of me pals. And ain't I bin a-cussin' of meself for it ever since? And ain't I dodged the front line whenever it was possible? Gawd, yes! *you* know that, sir! Not 'alf!"

"You've done your bit, Joe, I think."

"Not as *'e* 'as, sir. No, it's a shyme, I reckon. He done 'is best for the country, and now 'is country's goin' to start bullying 'im abaht and God-knows-what-all, instead of jest takin' 'im aht of the job which he's no good for any more, and usin' 'im in one which 'e'd do well. Strikes me the country's a chump, sometimes. . . . Is the Colonel comin' nearer, sir?"

"Yes, he's just at the door."

"*Is* 'e? Well, good-bye, sir." It was a comedian's exit such as Joe Wylie loved.

The Colonel's feet were on the stairs, and Tony waited for him. He entered in full marching kit, his revolver and map-case at his belt.

"Good evening, O'Grogan. I thought I'd better speak to Scrase before we move off."

"Yes, sir."

"How is he?"

"He's—he's resigned to the worst, sir. . . . Do you think he has a chance?"

"Not a ghost," said the Colonel. "This Passchendaele business has gone on too long. When you've got a Divisional Order posting policemen behind the attack to shoot any loiterers, dammit, they're not going to—they *can't* spare an officer."

Tony bowed his head.

The Colonel's next words, so far as they could struggle through his inarticulateness, sounded apologetic. "I had no course but to—— Against my better judgment, I tried to know nothing about that hand of his—but when I discovered this other business I could not allow my private feelings——"

"He doesn't seem worried about himself, sir," said Tony, coming to the Colonel's relief, "but only about the disgrace to the regiment if he's shot, and the fear of his people getting

to hear of it. He practically asked me to leave my revolver lying about."

"*Ur?*" inquired the Colonel sharply. "No, you can't do that. You can't do that."

"He argued it out perfectly quietly, sir—almost jovially—that if he—er—did this, and if you understood that it wasn't cowardice, he would save the regiment the disgrace of it all, and perhaps rehabilitate himself—and—and perhaps you'd let it go through as 'Killed in Action.'"

"Poor fellow!" sighed the Colonel; and, bemuddled by the conflict in him now between the two forces of his mind—between the soldierly sternness which was his dream and the human kindness which was himself—he sat down and fell into a long silence. At last he said: "No, it's too late to think of all these things now. . . . He should have . . . No, we can't monkey about like that. . . ."

"I suppose not," Tony agreed; and as he said it, he was surprised by the sinking of his heart.

That sinking gave him sight: it brought right home to him the inevitability of Scrase's sentence; then the full realization of what such a calamity meant; then his own passionate resistance against it and his cold desire that anything other than this should happen to Scrase—*anything*—even the alternative which Kit himself had suggested. Oh yes, yes: a thousand times better that Scrase should have his way than that the Law should have its way with Scrase. The Colonel was seated and silent; and Tony was silent too as he paced up and down. Probably the Colonel's mind was stationary in its bewilderment: not so Tony's: behind a wrinkled and aching forehead, he was working up to the most difficult decision of his life. It was he who first spoke; and when he spoke he was surprised at the fluency which passion was giving him.

"Sir," he began, "I can't help thinking that, though legally there may not be the faintest chance for Scrase, we ought to be able to get round the Law somehow. We're English, and not Germans or French, ruthlessly scientific and logical and all that. I always like to think that the English have too much humour and horse-sense to sacrifice their souls to Law and to Logic—I mean: we often manage, if a man's technically guilty but morally innocent, to let a little good sense flood the situation and save him. There was a case on Gallipoli

which delighted me at the time, when it was arranged behind the scenes that all the papers dealing with the technically guilty man should be 'destroyed by gun-fire.' I remember you laughed at the time and agreed that it was characteristically English."

"I remember," the Colonel acknowledged: "Corporal Player of the 19th East Lancs; yes, it was neatly done, that." To his romantic mind such praise of his country was a sure appeal.

"Yes, and there was the case of Padre Quickshaw's D.S.O. the other day. That was the same thing, only inverted, wasn't it? The padre was technically guilty but morally praiseworthy, so instead of being stupidly logical about it, we walked round the Law and got him a D.S.O."

"Quite," agreed the Colonel.

"Well, then, sir—about Scrase. Of course, technically, he's as guilty as ever man was, but look at what he's done: three years' absolutely top-hole work in the regiment, when, as I believe, he was feeling perfectly putrid all the time. Oh, we can't—we can't be going to be so unhumorous as to shoot him. Surely—surely something can be done."

The Colonel gave a long time to getting his disorganized brain around his subaltern's argument. Once or twice he started an answer and abandoned it, returning into himself. Tony stayed by the window, looking out. It must have been several minutes before the Colonel spoke.

"I'm afraid, O'Grogan, that things are different now from what they were in the first years of the war. Three years of it have knocked a good deal of our humour out of us, especially in high places."

"I've noticed it," said Tony. "But it survives in the lower ranks. I think it'll always be there."

"Yes. . . . Perhaps . . ." mused the Colonel. "I'm impressed by what you say, O'Grogan. . . . I am really. . . . And I wish to God I could do something to save Scrase. . . . But it would be unfair to suggest that I thought there was any hope for him. I *know* there isn't. . . . On paper it's too black a case. First an S.I. and then——"

Tony wheeled round from the window.

"Then, dammit, sir, let us—let *us* have the humour to give him the chance he's asked for. Look here, sir: I'm in charge of him, and God knows what my penalty'll be for neglecting

my duty, but I'm prepared to face that, and I'll—I'll go out and leave my revolver behind on the table. I'll"—the tears were in his voice now—"I count him just about my best friend, but I'm ready to be his executioner, if it'll save him any misery—if it'll mean that his men never hear that he was shot for cowardice, and his parents are told that he was 'killed in action.' I will, sir. I will, really."

"No, O'Grogan. No," stuttered the Colonel, "dammit, you mustn't do that. . . I can't allow that. . . ."

With a sigh Tony turned back to his window. The charged silence possessed the room again.

"If anybody had to take the responsibility for a thing like that," said the Colonel, "*I* would. Damn, O'Grogan! If it's hell for you, what's it for me who had to put him under arrest? . . ."

Silence again. Who could know what the Colonel was thinking? Some minutes later he also sighed, and looked at his wrist-watch.

"O'Grogan," he ordered, "go and tell Major Chamberlain that if I'm not there at the time, he's to march the battalion off himself. I shall follow."

"Yes, sir," said Tony woodenly—almost sullenly—and walked with studied smartness towards the door.

"And, O'Grogan: don't hurry back. I will be responsible here, and I may want to talk to Scrase."

"Very good, sir. . . . Sir"—the sullenness was gone—"you'll do what you can for him, won't you, sir?"

"Of course, O'Grogan."

Tony went; and the Colonel sat alone—pondering—pondering. At one time his hand strayed down towards the revolver at his belt; but his expression and his falling hand showed that he had relinquished an idea which had visited him. Another time he turned his head towards the door as if to call Scrase, but relinquished this plan also.

It was Joe Wylie who put an end to his thoughts by coming into the room and saying:

"Gaw! I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you was Mr. O'Grogan. *My* mistake, sir."

"You're Mr. O'Grogan's batman, aren't you?" asked the Colonel.

"Yessir."

"I hope you're a little less slovenly than you were."

"Yessir."

"I've had my eye on you before, haven't I?"

"Well, yes, you 'ave, sir."

"Er——" A new idea seemed to visit the Colonel. He said to himself, "H'm . . ." and then to Joe: "You're the Regimental Humorist, aren't you?"

"*Wurl*, I shouldn't like to say that, sir."

"But you have a talent for entertaining the men with stories, eh?"

"I do sometimes, sir."

"And I suppose you think you've got the story of your life now."

"How, sir?"

"With one of your officers under close arrest, and—whatever may happen to him."

Joe brushed the knuckle of his forefinger under both sides of his moustache.

"It don't strike me as a funny story, sir. Rather the other way."

"But it's a damned fine story to tell," reminded the Colonel, fixing his eye on Joe. "I suppose it would be asking a miracle to ask you not to tell it."

"Not to tell what, sir?"

"Well, whatever may be the end of it all."

"I wouldn't if you arst me not to, sir, and if it'd be any satisfaction to Captain Scrase."

"What would you do when the men pumped you for information?"

"I'd tell 'em a power of lies if I 'ad to, sir."

"Good!" said the Colonel, laughing, but with no real mirth. "You can invent stories, eh?"

"I do sometimes make 'em up, sir."

"Well, Wylie, what about never telling the true story but inventing a better one instead, eh?"

Joe was now staring back at the Colonel.

"I dessay I could think out something, sir."

"Do it, then. You say you're sorry for him."

"Yes, sir. If I may say so, *yes*, sir."

"Right. Then you won't want to add more punishment to any he may have to take?"

At this Joe's expression clouded with a mild perplexity. "*Add* to it, sir?"

"Add the extra shame and disgrace which would come if it were talked about and known. His parents, you see."

"Oh, I *know* them, sir. His father's Alderman Scrase in our Burrer—a fine old gen'l'man——"

"All the more reason why you shouldn't talk now or when you go on leave. It seems a small thing to ask you to give up this damned fine story, but I know enough of human nature to see that it isn't. . . . You will, though?"

"*Yurse*, sir. *You* trust *me*, sir."

"All right. . . . H'm. . . ." The Colonel looked towards the door of Joe's room. "Do you sleep in there?"

"Yessir."

"H'm. . . . Well. . . . I suppose you're expecting to go on leave soon?"

"Yes, sir. I bin sweatin' on my leave for some time now."

"I'll do what I can to put it through at once."

"Thenk you, sir."

Joe was moving towards the room when the Colonel, his eyes on the ground, called to him again. "If you like to go and see the battalion off, Wylie, you may. You can tell Mr. O'Grogan I sent you."

"I think I ought to be packin', sir. We're supposed to be moving off after the battalion——"

"Oh, damn that!" snapped the Colonel, irritably. "That's all right. There's no hurry."

"Right, sir. Then I think I will jest nip awf. Thenk you, sir."

And Joe Wylie followed Tony out into the falling dusk. Colonel Tappiter sat on in his chair, rather dumpily, as if the battle in his mind was weighing him down. A misery of indecision, such as his, relaxed a figure usually erect. He heard very far away the voices of his officers shouting the orders of the march to the battalion, and the tramping of many feet as the battalion passed along the road by the farm-yard gate. The men, marching at ease, were whistling in unison, "When we've wound up the Watch on the Rhine . . ." and they carried the tune away with them down the road. He stood up and went to the window, and saw the afterglow of the sunset behind the furthest trees. Then he looked towards the door of Joe Wylie's room. As if merely curious at first, he walked to the door and pushed it open. There was Joe

Wylie's kit, neatly folded and piled on the floor, and his rifle leaning against the corner. He went in and picked up the webbing equipment, and looked at the ammunition pouches with their clips of cartridges. He dropped the equipment so that it fell back untidily on the folded blankets and ground-sheet. He looked at the rifle: it was clean, and he restored it to its corner. He came out and pulled the door after him, but not so that it latched; and he began the sentry-go of a frustrated thinker up and down the room. Up and down, up and down —Oh God, for a decision! He took his debate back to the chair and sat down, wrestling with it still. His arm, lying along the table, kept automatically lifting up its hand and letting it fall; and later he discovered that he was examining his nails, and idly tending them. Well, one couldn't sit here for ever—O'Grogan would be back soon. "Leave it to chance? I dunno." Scrase: a good fellow; one of the best, really; had served him splendidly for three years all over the world. And now a firing party—a wall. Oh damn, no! The boy was right in asking an opportunity to escape from that. And young O'Grogan was right in all he said too. The boy could be given his opening, if—if he himself could make up his mind about it. For himself it would mean what? Understanding from the Higher Powers, probably, if he told the truth to the Court of Enquiry; or a mere censure, and there an end, did he plead guilty to no more than negligence in the matter: and in any case, the applause or the punishment that might be his—these were unimportant considerations. To stiffen his decision that the action itself was right, this was all that exercised him now.

But the action—oh, it was awful—he couldn't do it. . . . But if he didn't do it he left Scrase to his fate, and that was more awful. Was he to be a coward too, and just run away from an ordeal, and leave a boy to his fate? A firing party for Scrase? Damn! it *wasn't* thinkable. He rose up again and walked to the door of Wylie's room, and stood opposite for a while longer, before his will worked. Then with his foot he kicked at the door so that it swung open, disclosing the rifle leaning against the corner and the tumbled belt of cartridges lying on the kit.

Coming away and standing by the table once more, he called, "Scrase"; and, not receiving an answer, called again.

"Sir!"

Scrase was leaving the room across the passage, and now came into his presence.

"I—er—thought I must say good-bye to you, Scrase. The battalion has gone, and I'm just going to follow it. I—er——I wanted to say good-bye to you."

"Thank you, sir. . . . Good-bye." Nervously Scrase put out his hand, but the Colonel did not at once take it.

"And I should like to tell you that I am immensely grateful for all you've done, and—er—whatever happens over this wretched business, you can be certain that I shall—I shall do my best to insure that your parents hear only a good report of you. O'Grogan was telling me all you'd been saying about them."

"Thank you, sir." Scrase said it with a smile. "I *was* a bit anxious about them."

"Well, you needn't be. . . . No, I don't think you need be. . . . It's quite possible for me to pull all sorts of strings, you know. . . ." (When had he said those words before—*when* was it?)

"Yes, sir. And I—I should like to say that the only other thing that worries me is the thought of having brought disgrace on the battalion."

"Oh, well . . . perhaps that won't happen. . . . You know that among the officers, at any rate, you are getting nothing but sympathy and—yes, I think I may say, admiration for your work in the past——"

"But there's no chance for me, sir, is there?"

The Colonel, suddenly afraid that his last words might have raised impossible hopes, looked him faithfully in the eyes.

"I'm afraid not, Scrase. . . . Forgive me, but I don't want to be dishonest with you."

"No, sir. . . . I understand. Thank you."

Colonel Tappiter stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, then, Scrase."

"Good-bye, sir," said Scrase, taking the Colonel's hand firmly, who gripped his and held it. . . . "But excuse me, sir, where's O'Grogan?"

"I—I sent him out for a bit, but he should be back soon. And his batman too—so you'll be alone for a little while."

A curious look appeared on Scrase's face.

"Thank you, sir."

"Oh, that's nothing . . . that's nothing . . ." and he released Scrase's hand. "Well, I must be going. . . . Yes. . . ."

And without another word he went quietly down the stairs. He passed out into the yard before the farmhouse and walked towards the gate in the roadside wall. There he turned and hurried back; but stopped and paused—and turned round again. Reaching the road, he walked a little way till the side of the house hid him from the view of the window of Scrase's room. There he waited. He saw O'Grogan returning, and moved as if to stop him—but paused again. If things were not to be as he had imagined them, they were *not* to be. In two minutes' time O'Grogan would be back in that room; and he himself could hurry off to his horse and his groom, and canter after the battalion. But even as he thought this, a shot rang out from a room in the farmhouse; and the Colonel, with a sharp intake of breath and a face very white, hurried back to it.

CHAPTER X

JOE WYLIE GOES ON LEAVE

TONY was spurring his horse along the road from Poperinghe to Oostvleteren. All feeling blunted within him, he thought of nothing but a present dour purpose to find Quickshaw and bring him back to Proven. For Quickshaw was moving with Brigade Headquarters to the north. The whole brigade was gone; Colonel Tappiter was gone—gone to tell his story and "pull his strings;" not a man of the Royal West Essex battalions, except himself and Wylie, was left in Proven village. A new brigade with a new chaplain had taken over the old tents and barns; and they were too interested by far in the waiting body of his friend. These strangers might have to dig Kit's grave, but their padre should not bury him. On that Tony was resolved: he had already quarrelled hotly with this alien chaplain. This pompous little parson to sit in judgment on Kit, who was worth a hundred of him! Tony remembered Kit's laughing manner, one hour before the shot was fired, and he cried aloud that Kit's passing was as grand as Hughes Anson's or Childe Harold's or Aylwin's. Grander even, because Kit had been spared nothing: these men had been allowed to hang a curtain of hope and doubt between themselves and the oncoming death, he had watched its approach with his eyes unveiled; they, if they suspected its nearness, had been able to take comfort in the knowledge that it came wrapped round with honour, he had seen that it came to him wrapped round with shame. And none the less he had kept well within the fashion of these years, and had met it with a grim smile.

And think, not a word had he said before going, not a message left, of affection or of gratitude for their long friendship: he had just looked into Tony's eyes, and trusted them to

understand. That was Kit Scrase. It was the English way, and Tony honoured it.

So now, every feeling except an angry purpose blunted within him, Tony cantered and galloped towards Quickshaw. One day perhaps he would try to think out all that had happened within the last few days, but not now—not now. Now let him only ride on, too bruised in mind to suffer much. It was good to have something to do.

When Quickshaw heard about the alien chaplain, he said only, "Pfaw! these wretched little legalists! I hate them. A wood louse shows more imagination. I expect, if the truth's known, he's only been out about four or five minutes. When he's had ten years of the war, perhaps he'll begin to realize something about it; though I doubt if he's got the brain. His kind, as a rule, are only fit for legislating on the shape of a biretta. I've no use for them;" and he borrowed a horse and rode back with Tony.

Tony led him straight to the battalion headquarters where the new chaplain lived; and as he entered the room he detected in himself a snobbish satisfaction that Quickshaw wore a crown on his shoulder-straps (or should have worn one), whereas the stranger wore only three stars. Partly to emphasize this seniority, and partly to vex the legalist mind of the stranger who would insist that chaplains should be called "Mr." he announced, "This is Major Quickshaw."

"Oh yes," acknowledged the chaplain brightly. "My name's Irwin."

Quickshaw, with his protruding eyes, scanned the man before him. He saw a tall and slender young man of thirty, with large dull eyes and an obstinate mouth, but, otherwise, a face well-meaning enough. He saw also a very smart uniform, complete with white collar and black stock, bran new leggings and shining brown boots. Tony, watching Quickshaw's face, knew at once that he was summing up the result of this survey in the verdict, "No, *he'll* never learn anything," but all that Quickshaw said aloud was, "Well, what's the trouble?"

"Oh, there's no trouble," said Irwin, with the pleasant conciliatory tone that many parsons acquire. "Nothing to speak of."

"Oh, *isn't* there, by God!" muttered Tony, not wholly to himself.

"All that happened was," explained Irwin, "that this officer went off the deep end when I——"

"Would you mind if we talked it over a little less flippantly?" asked Quickshaw. "This officer and I *feel* the matter rather."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to sound flippant. He was rather rude to me when I told him I couldn't conscientiously bury his friend with the full rites of the Church."

Quickshaw stared at him—as at a phenomenon which repaid study. "Why?" he demanded at last.

"Well . . ." Irwin hesitated. "You know the rubric at the beginning of the Burial Office——"

"I'm sure I don't," answered Quickshaw. "I've forgotten it. What is it?"

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Irwin, as if he thought Quickshaw himself was joking now. "You know that it says that the Office isn't to be used on persons who 'have laid violent hands upon themselves.'"

Again Quickshaw stared in amazement at the young man; and when he spoke, the spawl had formed at his lips.

"Does it? I had forgotten. I suppose I knew it once—before the war."

It was plain that Irwin did not know what to make of this slovenly little figure with the staring eyes; and he looked elsewhere, in some discomfort.

"So I represented to this officer," he continued, "that we could only obey the rules of the Church, whatever our private feelings might be. We can't set up our private feelings against Authority——"

"Oh, can't we?" said Quickshaw. "*I* can."

"I'm sorry; but then that's where we differ. I told this officer that I would do all that I reasonably could. I have an abbreviated Office which I usually take in these cases, and it commends the—er—the dead man to the 'uncovenanted mercies of God.'"

"A very nice phrase!" interrupted Quickshaw, with an ugly movement of his lower lip. "It's—s'wonderful how we can fall in love with words. But may I ask when such a case has come your way before?"

"Oh, they crop up now and then, in peace time, as you know. We're a very large London parish."

"Oh—in peace time? Yes," Quickshaw nodded; and his tone might have meant anything.

"And I promised him I'd do all that. More I couldn't do —and won't. One must have *some* principles, mustn't one? You, I imagine, are prepared to do more."

"Oh yes; just a little more," sneered Quickshaw. "Just a little more. It may interest you to know that I've buried seventeen hundred and fifty men since this war started, and I reckon that Captain Scrase was about the best of them. If ever you attain to a tenth part of his quality, my son, you'll begin to understand what principles are. I shall say the complete Office over him, and a good deal more."

"Oh well, that's *your* responsibility," shrugged Irwin, who was annoyed.

"Thanks . . . yes. . . . And may I ask you a question: have you been out very long?"

"Out where?"

"'Been out' is a phrase we use in these parts for 'Been at the front.' But perhaps you'd understand 'Been on Active Service' better—I believe that's the stilted phrase. Have you been on active service long?"

The young man blushed; and this was the first time that Tony perceived the curious little war which was developing in these later years—the camouflaged hostility between the "old hands" and the new-comers from England.

"No," he admitted, "not very long."

"I thought not. A year, perhaps?"

"No . . . not as much as that . . ." the young man prevaricated, rather sullenly.

"Well, I won't compel you to say 'three months,'" began Quickshaw with a scornful laugh.

"I've been out longer than that——" snapped Irwin.

"Have you?—well," Quickshaw took him up, "when you've had another seven years of it, you may have learnt some sense; but I doubt it. Meanwhile you might study with profit a pompous ass in Bunyan called Mr. Legality. Try and get yer intelligence to work on it. . . . Come on, O'Grogan——" the resentful fish-like eyes flashed up at Tony; "we'll go and look into this matter."

They passed out from the presence of Irwin; and as they walked away, Quickshaw's only comment was, "Pfoo! he's a worm and no man."

Four men of the strange brigade laid Scrase in the earth, and the only other mourners who stood by were Tony, Joe

Wylie, Quickshaw. Irwin watched the proceedings from a few paces away. He heard Quickshaw mutter with angry compassion, as he always did, the words which he always used: "We thank Thee, Father, for the life and work of this our brother; we praise Thee for his high soul, faithful unto death. . . ."

Next day Tony left Proven to attend a Court of Enquiry held in secret; and Joe Wylie went on leave.

Joe Wylie had never been in such a room, nor Mrs. Wylie either; and their eyes roamed around its pictures and its furniture, as the manservant, pushing open the door, passed them in before him, in the most gentlemanly way. They thought it a beautiful room, and so artistic: with its heavy, gilt-framed pictures, its rich brocade curtains and long lace ones, its huge break-fronted bureaux, its grand piano covered with Indian shawls and photographs in silver frames, its sofas and chairs nursing plaid-silk cushions, its occasional tables and its tall palm. On one side of the chesterfield sofa, which stood at an angle from the fireplace, there was a little flounced work-table; and from this Mrs. Wylie deduced that the Lady of the House was a motherly woman—but that was the limit of her deductions. On the other side and against the wall was a table holding the Gentleman's books and journals: *The Morning Post*, *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic*, *Punch*, *The Conservative Party Journal*, *The National Review*, a novel of Bulwer Lytton's and a more modern work of Miss Dell's—and from these, Joe Wylie, as his eye fell upon them, deduced nothing at all. It was not in Joe, nor in Tib Wylie his wife, to read a great part of Alderman Scrase's character, and Mrs. Scrase's, from the furnishings of their Drawing Room.

So far as it was possible for Joe to be tidy and clean, he was so this evening; he had "spruced himself up" for this visit; or perhaps Mrs. Wylie had given a hand to the business. His hair was greased down; his moustache, for once, was regimented with wax, and on his khaki there were many light patches which had obviously been dark ones before the friction of a rag dipped in petrol. As for Tib, she was magnificent; an ample blonde, she was dressed in all her feathery best;

and her best was full in the fashion of 1917 as reflected by the poor.

"Mr. Scrase will be down very shortly to see you," said the manservant.

"Yuss." It was all that Joe could say.

Not so Mrs. Wylie; she was full of curiosity and eager to satisfy it. "What's this room?" she asked. "This the Drorin' Room?"

"Yes—er," said the manservant, his lips having attempted the "madam," but failed.

"Is this where they sit after supper?"

"They sit here after dinner," the manservant announced. "Or sometimes in the Second Drawing Room."

Mrs. Wylie cast a look at her husband. "They've *two* Drorin' Rooms, Jow. Fency!"

"Yuss," said Joe.

"And Mrs. Scrase, pore lydy," asked Tib, returning to her questioning of the servant: "how is she now?"

"She's picking up."

"Yur——" Mrs. Wylie's head shook—"the noos must 'a' bin an awful shock."

The manservant bowed; "nodded" would be a word suggesting too rapid a *tempo*. "We are all very much upset," he told her.

"Yurse——" plainly she had no use for this equation of a servant's grief with a parent's—"but she was his mother, yer see. Oh, if I've once imagined meself gettin' the same noos about Jow, I've imagined it fifty times, and it's—it's——" already her eyes were awash, having adjusted themselves to her words—"it's proper played me up every time."

"Still," interrupted Joe, who seemed afraid that Tib might go on and say too much, "he was killed in action. It wasn't like as if—I mean, it was a fine sorta death."

The manservant bowed again. "That is our consolation," he announced; and, since this appeared a good sentence on which to make his exit, bowed once more—somewhat doubtfully—and retired.

"Now, Tib," adjured Wylie quickly, "do be careful now. I'm not so 'appy about your 'avin' come. I don't know what you wanted to come for."

"Ow, I 'ad to see what their 'ome was like," Tib explained, "and I guessed they'd show us up into the Drorin' Room

like this. Eh, Jow; ain't it an enormous plyce, with manservants and all? I shouldn't think they've a penny less than a thah'sand a year."

"Never mind that," Joe objected. "What I meanter say is——"

"Is that his photo?" asked Tib, pointing to a portrait on the mantelpiece whose silver frame had been raised to the dignity of a little easel and decorated across one corner with the ribbon of the Military Cross.

"Gaw!" exclaimed Joe, coming close. "Yes, that's 'im—yuss, pore lad. But don't 'e look much younger there?"

"O Jow. . . ." This pitiful cry was Mrs. Wylie's poem on the death of Kit Scrase; it was all she could utter as she gazed at the face of the young man, but many far more elaborate laments have sprung from a smaller pain and an indignation less sincere.

Joe fled from the threat of tears.

"Well, never mind that," he repeated. "What I meanter say is: when I get in here, I wish I'd never towld you the real truth. I ain't towld it to no one else—honest to God I ain't—but——"

"But you down think that I——" all the aggrievement of a very romantic woman was in Mrs. Wylie's tone—"you down think that by so much as a look I'd let the pore sufferin' lydy suspect anything. I'd tear me tongue out first."

"No, you wouldn't do it directly, Tib; not *directly*. But you'll be so up in the air, havin' called on the Alderman, and bein' shown by a manservant into the parlour, that you'll get talkin'—and then you'll get confidential——"

"Ow, I shan't! I shan't never! Ain't I given you me absolute word of honour I won't?"

"Still——" Joe Wylie shook his head and walked despairingly towards the mantelpiece—"I wish to Gawd I 'adn't never told yer. I ain't told another soul, I swear I 'aven't."

"But a wife's different," protested Mrs. Wylie, both for his rebuke and for his comfort. "She and her husband are the same person like. Tellin' 'er's jest about the same as keepin' it to yerself."

"It ought to be," said Joe to the mantelpiece, "but blarst me if it generally works out like that."

Mrs. Wylie was hurt. "Well, dah't me word if you want to.

But I given it. I can't do no more. I said, and I say again: if ever I tell, may I be struck dead where I stand. There! I can't say more than thet, can I?"

She had hardly invoked this curse before the Alderman and his wife entered. Joe and Tib Wylie saw a tall, attenuated, grey-haired gentleman of sixty, about whom everything was very smart except his tumbled old snuff-coloured smoking jacket. This garment, no doubt, was the standard which he ran up the mast when Duty, his sovereign, was not in residence; but all the rest of his dress to-night was fresh from her courts and as ceremonial as need be: black striped morning trousers, black waistcoat, white slip, high starched collar, and big bunched tie pierced by a golden pin. A pompous but conscientious, kindly and romantic gentleman—so cleverer eyes than the Wylies' might have judged. And Mrs. Scrase, who had preceded him through the door, gallantly held open for her, was exactly the partner they would have expected of him; she was as inevitable as any item of his attire (it might be surmised, indeed, that she *was* an item of that attire): a kindly, conscientious, romantic lady, in a gown of black silk relieved by a heavy golden chain and some folds of grey chiffon. Possessing a number of valuable rings, she liked to wear them all at once, and could do so without vulgarity. Nothing could ever be vulgar about Alderman Scrase's wife, because her quiet manner would tune everything down to its own note: she was one of those refined, soft, gentle old ladies who gave no quarter to Germans.

"Very good of you to come, Wylie," said the Alderman, who could not help a certain pomposity when speaking to a private soldier. "It was most fortunate that you should be on leave at this—er——" and here, even in so sad an interview, the language of the Council Chamber took command—"this juncture. I am naturally glad of the opportunity to ask you several things."

"Yuss, sir," said Joe.

Mrs. Scrase meanwhile was glancing at Mrs. Wylie. "And this is——?" she asked.

"His wife, mum," answered Mrs. Wylie, prompt to introduce herself. "Mrs. Wylie, mum. Yuss."

"Oh I see," Mrs. Scrase bowed.

"I jest come along," explained Mrs. Wylie, nodding in a rich condolence, "to offer you me sympathy, mum. I've heard

so much from Jow here of your boy that I feel as if I almost knew him and me heart goes out to you——"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "Everyone is most kind. Do please sit down."

"Yuss. Thenk you, mum."

They all sat down, Joe on one stiff chair and his wife on another; Mrs. Scrase on the chesterfield, and the Alderman in his favourite fireside chair, which he pulled round so that he could face the visitors. Then silence seized hold of all.

"My boy often mentioned you in his letters, Wylie," tried Mr. Scrase, "and always with appreciation."

"Yuss. Thenk you, sir."

The silence again; and Mrs. Scrase rearranged her chiffon before playing her part.

"Yes, he used to tell us how you would come in and amuse them all with your stories and your jokes. A great story-teller, aren't you, Mr. Wylie?"

"Oh—nothin' to write 'ome about, mum," Joe demurred.

"Yes, you are; you know you are!" objected Mrs. Wylie. "Thet's right, mum: he is. He knows 'ow to tell a story if anyone does. They're always wantin' 'im at their sing-songs dahn at the—dahn at the 'otel."

The Alderman, who had not been listening to this, coughed and examined the fingers of his right hand.

"And now, Wylie: you were with him when he died, I understand; will you tell us exactly how he met his end? My wife and I have decided that we can bear it."

"Yes, you tell 'em, Jow," encouraged Mrs. Wylie; and she turned towards Mrs. Scrase in her eagerness to show sympathy. "Ow, it's a lovely story, mum. I feel I should only be prah'd if I was his ma; you know, more prah'd and 'appy than sad—like."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "I shall try to be."

"Please go on, Wylie," said the Alderman.

"Well, it was like this 'ere, sir," said Joe. "We did a bit of an attack in front of Ee-prez, and Captain Scrase, he was jumpin' aht of his shell-hole when the zero hour come and hollerin' to his men to rush forward and do their damnedest, when he suddenly—in his excitement—slipped back, as you might say, and sprained his ankle good and proper. And the boys had to go on without 'im and tyke their objectives. Well,

you can imagine; with a gen'l'man like your son, he took it dreadful hard, 'avin', as you might say, stayed behind his men at the critical moment; and he begged and begged that he might be given the next raid to lead, or the next dangerous job——"

Mr. Scrase nodded. "I wouldn't have had him do otherwise," he said. "Please go on."

"But it so 'appened, sir," continued Joe, "that almost immediately the battalion was moved aht to rest billets, and he was proper cut up because he would have no opportunity to lead his men again. And when we got to a place called Proven, the rumour come that we were going north to a very cushy spot—Nieuport, to be exact. Of course everyone was fairly chortlin' except Captain Scrase, sir, and 'e'd got it fixed in his head that he ought to go back and do a charge or something."

"I understand, I understand," said the Alderman.

"So he worried the colonel to death abaht it and—and, well, would you believe it, sir, the very night the battalion was movin' out of Proven there come another battalion which was going up the line and wanted an awficer guide. And Captain Scrase, 'e says at once, 'That's me, sir. I'm the only one that wants to go back.' And the Colonel says, 'You're a bloody fool, Scrase——'" Joe turned to Mrs. Scrase: "they all talk like that, mum, but they don't mean nothing by it—not really—'You're a ruddy fool, Scrase,' he says, 'but you're a brave one. Go along of 'em, then.' So Captain Scrase, pleased as your life, come along and says to Mr. O'Grogan—his friend as you've heard of, I expect, sir—I was doing batman for both of them just then, because we was a bit short o' men after Ee-prez—really—he says, 'I'll efta tyke Wylie along o' me,' he says, and you can bet I wasn't pleased at all. So back to the line we went—Mr. O'Grogan got left behind at Proven on some cleanin'-up job, and he'll bear me aht in this—and when we got back to the old shell-'oles and bits of trench, we found the old Boche in them, and the very first thing we 'ad to do was to counter-attack and drive 'em aht. Now there was no need for your Mr. Scrase to take part in the attack, he bein' only sort o' temporarily attached, but he insisted on tyking over a platoon whose awficer had jest gawn sick. And when the time come, he simply went over hell-fer-leather, yellin' aht to the boys, 'Them's *ah'r* trenches, not the old Boches'. Who's comin'

'ome?' And he was the fust to leap into one of the old shell-oles, and there he was, shootin' right and left, almost on the very spot where he'd tumbled and bin left behind before. Well, he stopped one, sir, but it didn't kill 'im, not straight away, and he kept yellin' aht, 'Consolidate the position. . . . Consolidate. . . . Consolidate,' till he lawst consciousness."

"Were you there to see all this?" asked Mr. Scrase.

"N-no, sir," Joe admitted. "But I had it all from one of the men who was singin' his praises. Well, we got 'im back as far as Proven, and there—there, mum, he passed away."

"I see," murmured Mrs. Scrase, while her husband studied the carpet.

"Yuss," said Joe.

"And did he—did he regain consciousness?" asked Mrs. Scrase.

"No, mum; you can trust me that he never had no pain. And let me tell you this, mum: there was a very smart battalion in the Proven billets at the time, and they give 'im a fine funeral. *Yur*, thet's *absolutely* true: Mr. O'Grogan—Captain O'Grogan as he is now—he see to that. And him and me stood by and watched it all. We was the only ones of his regiment there."

"I see," Mrs. Scrase nodded. "And—his grave?"

"It's there, mum," said Joe. "In a line with the others."

"Has it a cross?"

"Oh yes, mum. A cross the same as the others, with his name, jest simple like: 'Captain Scrase. Killed in Action. R.I.P.' . . . Yuss, I made it meself."

All of them, since in imagination they stood before this grave, honoured it with silence. It must be for the Alderman to dismiss the silence.

"Thank you, my man," he said. "You have made us very happy."

And Mrs. Scrase echoed him. "Thank you, Mr. Wylie."

"Oh, it's nothin', sir," said Joe. "You're very welcome."

"And if there's anything I can do for you at any time——" began the Alderman.

"Nah, sir. Don't you worry, sir. I've only got six more days' leave, and 'eaven knows when I shall be back in these parts again."

Mrs. Scrase withdrew the handkerchief with which she had touched her eyes. "Oh, you are going back, are you?"

"Yes, mum."

Rising, so that Joe rose too, she put out her hand; and he took it awkwardly. "Ah, God keep you safe," she said. "I shall be praying for you."

"Yuss, mum," acknowledged Joe. "Thenk you, mum."

"Take care of yourself," begged Mrs. Scrase, now holding his hand in both of hers.

"Yuss, mum. Yuss, you bet."

"And now, mum——" this was Mrs. Wylie, whose sympathy was still flowing richly. Her husband had done his part and been a credit to her and she could take the centre of the stage —"I expect you'd like us to leave you to it. You'd rather be alone together, wouldn't yer? Of course yer would! I know what your feelin's must be, and strangers *is* such a nuisance at a time like this."

She stood up; and Joe picked up the cap which he had laid on the floor.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "You are very understanding."

"Ow yes, mum, I understand. If I've said it once, I've said it a thah'sand times, I've said: 'If I efta hear that my Jow's gawn west, I only arsts to be told that he died bravely, and then to be left alone with me sorrer and me pride."

Mrs. Scrase wept softly; and Mrs. Wylie turned to her husband: "Jow, come on. . . ."

"Yuss," said Joe.

"*Good*-bye, mum; *good*-bye, sir," Mrs. Wylie gushed. "Gawd bless yer. And down you worry about comin' to the door with us. We can find our way out and jest go quietly."

"Yuss," said Joe.

But Mrs. Scrase touched a bell, saying, "A servant will show you out."

"Ow, I see." Mrs. Wylie corrected her interpretations. "Yuss."

And they waited for the servant, who appeared and shepherded them away.

Kit Scrase's father and mother were left alone. They stood looking at each other for a moment, and then, on the same impulse, embraced. When they had parted from the embrace,

the Alderman returned to his chair and lit himself a cigar and blew his clouds of smoke into the air. And his wife went to her seat on the sofa and lifted some incomplete sewing out of her little work-table and got on with it. But she laid it down that she might look into the fire, while her husband continued to blow smoke into the air.

CHAPTER XI

WAITING FOR MARCH

THE battalion was marching through the night from La Panne to Nieuport; and at the head of C Company marched its new commanding officer, Captain O'Grogan, D.S.O., sole survivor of the officers it had known. He led one hundred and twenty men along the level road that wound its way between the Dutch poplars, under the autumn stars. Of these less than twenty had seen Ypres and Railway Wood and dredged the bogs of the Salient; all the others were men of a new draft which had been attached to him at La Panne, a heterogeneous mob collected from every part of Britain—Welshmen and Jocks and weeded-out munition workers from Midland factories, and conscript boys and oldsters of forty from anywhere and everywhere—not the men of East London and Romford and Thamesmouth who had given its peculiar character to the 15th Royal West Essex before it went to die in the Passchendaele mud. The old battalion was dead; long live the new battalion. One would try to be loyal to it, but one might be forgiven if one's love stayed behind with the old dead king.

So as he marched along at the head of his unfamiliar men, Tony was thinking of Wimborne and Aylwin and Hughes Anson; and of Webster and Sparrow and Fred Roberts and Sergeant Jim Stott. And of Scrase too—but of Scrase not much nor clearly; for his thoughts, when they turned that way, seemed abruptly to stand still and to stare, benumbed and impotent.

Rosy Hughes, Childe Harold, Aylwyn, Moulden: he knew naught of their passing. They had just disappeared; that was all. He had seen the last of them when he wished them good luck at the door of Railway Wood, and now they were not in their places as the battalion marched along; that was all.

The "Fall in" had sounded along the sea wall of La Panne, and many men had paraded, but not these. Curious how simple and how quiet their departure! In front there, just behind the rumps of Colonel Tappiter's horse and the Adjutant's, a mounted stranger led Rosy's men in column of fours—at least he led a remnant of them, for the greater number had followed their merry laughing captain, with his stolen rum aglow in their stomachs, over the last parapet of all—as they had followed him, laughingly and admiringly, over many another hazardous ridge before. Rosy and your men, where are you raiding now? Tony, as he offered this question to the night, imagined a momentary return of Hughes Anson: he saw his tall wide shape looming out of the darkness into which he had gone, and his merry face recognizing Tony, who peered over the parapet: "Hallo, Bungay!" he calls. "It was a good war."

Childe Harold. His voice, lifted in schoolboy impudence, would not be heard when they arrived at Company Headquarters in Nieuport, nor Aylwin's authoritative jabber about the new sector and the neighbouring divisions and the strength of the enemy in front and the real significance of their move. A young subaltern called Arnold and another called Copeman would speak with Tony there, and who and what were they? Oh, no doubt in every way they were fellows as sound and as attractive and amusing as his companions of yesterday, and he was wrong in thinking them dull substitutes; but so they were to him, and so they would be for some time yet. And they wanted to be so friendly! Good fellows, they treated him, their new O.C., with such respect! Well, he would meet them gaily. Cheerio, Arnold! not too bad a march, was it? Tired, Copeman? Oh, you'll soon get used to it. Have a spot of the best. . . . *What?* What did you say? . . . Sorry, old man; I was thinking of something else. There are ghosts behind your seats, where they hoped themselves to sit.

And then old Moulden. Ha, God rest him merry! The very fact that he could think of him as "old Moulden" showed that all the former hate had died and something like affection was blossoming over its grave. Pshaw! What fools we were, you and I, old Moulden, to hate and revile each other when we might have known that any hour would close your story or mine! A tough composition this human nature of ours, persisting in the pettiest spites and envies right up to the guns

of the Hindenburg Line. It was all so silly, and we realized that it was silly, and yet we were powerless to get shut of it. Good-bye, old Moulden. Somehow to-night you seem no less worthy than Rosy and Kit Scrase and the Childe. Death has lifted you all to one level. I can see no ups and downs on the sky-line over which you passed out of sight.

Coxyde. . . . Oost Dunkerque. Now at last I am on the actual cobbles which I trod eight years ago with Frank Doyly when we were talking of nothing else than this war. 1910, and we were walking south, then, from Nieuport to Oost Dunkerque; now it is 1917, and I am walking the opposite way and alone, for Frank has gone the way of the great majority; he actually received his bullet only a few miles from here. One ought to be appalled at the strangeness of the coincidence; but one isn't; one has ceased to wonder at anything strange. Yes, I remember these trees by the side of the road, and the flat meadows; and there, of course, is the narrow-gauge line of the Chemins de Fer Vicinaux—the devil! I had forgotten it. O Frank, Frank; under all our gunpowder talk that sunny afternoon I was indulging the pleasant fancy that I would make you the friend of my life; and I never saw you again! But I know you remembered that gaudy talk, and thought of it, when you came this way with your regiment. Coming back here to die—it really was a pretty coincidence! And here I come in my turn. Perhaps I am destined to die here too. Perhaps Time is a lie, and the Future was walking beside us that sunny afternoon. Perhaps the road beneath our feet, unblinkered by our human sense of time, was wiser than we, and knew.

And I was thinking of a life-long friendship with you! How cynically the gods jest with us! We hunger for an enduring friendship, and nothing endures but our loneliness. Nothing. Nothing. Even a wife or a sister recedes from us sooner or later; and as for our friends, they are with us for a lively hour, and then they go. What a procession they are as they touch us in passing and disappear! There was little Wavers at my prep.-school, and old Raking at St. Paul's, and Sybil Chandry at Grandelmere, and you, Frank, one summer here in Belgium; and there was Wilmington on the ship, and Rosy Hughes and Kit Scrase. And others are coming, and what will be the good of them? they will only go.

Tramp, tramp, tramp of soldiers wearied into silence.

Nothing is stable; nothing permanent—unless Peggy's right and we can hold fast to God. Let's think a bit: is not the very completeness of our solitude an evidence for God? All our nature reels back from anything so meaningless and merciless as a world without Him. At least mine does. . . . Is faith coming to me? . . . If so, I know what I shall do. Ah yes . . . yes; and it would be rather wonderful. Hasn't something been prompting me towards it all my life? Out of my balked affections hasn't there grown in me, ever strengthening, a love for all men everywhere, and a great pain of pity for them, till now it is restless to escape in ministration? Oh, could I but add to this a love of God, my road would be clear. . . . Will it come, this one thing needful, I wonder?

And a flush of delight seemed to irradiate his mind as he pictured for himself the happy, the blessed, life of a priest. . . . But he didn't know if so serene a lot would ever be his; and he couldn't think it out now, plodding on to Nieuport.

At Nieuport there was a very cheery member of C Company's mess, in the cellar among the rubble: Captain O'Grogan. His new subalterns, Arnold, Copeman and McRae, were jokers all; and he laughed with them as heartily as the next man, and sometimes when cynicism ruled the conversation, would offer a remark that beat their best. Long years before there had been a small boy at a prep.-school, O'Grogan Minor, who was indulging one morning a sick despair, but had anything in his manner shown it? Nothing. That morning O'Grogan Minor dealt very creditably with Ovid's *Tristia* and gave some really bright answers in his Divinity hour, and, if he lapsed into inattention more than once, why, that was quite usual with him, because as a day-dreamer he enjoyed a prodigious reputation. So Captain O'Grogan now: from his manner none of his brother officers could have guessed that a fixed sadness preyed on him by day, and a visiting fear haunted him at night. If he was abstracted sometimes, they held that he was composing poetry. It was whispered that he did this thing.

And damn: these subalterns of his among themselves called him "the old man"! He became aware that a new and gayer generation had appeared in the war, and that he belonged to the old. He was only twenty-nine, but what is war, if not

an intensification of all life, its pleasures and dolours, its friendships and hates, its sins and sanctities, its beauties and uglinesses? and a life in microcosm was focused within these four years, so that this experience of Captain O'Grogan was exactly the experience through which we all must pass in the late thirties when we find in our rooms a crowd of young creatures who, to our dismay, talk apart from us and call us "Sir."

Captain O'Grogan's fear was not a fear of pain or of death, but of himself. A shapeless, nameless fear that eluded the net of descriptive words: a fear lest he failed terribly when ordered again to lead an attack—lest he became like Scrase—lest his will were slowly atrophied by a corroding intellectual despair; and then a fear of this fear itself. A bomb tossed into a pill-box at Passchendaele had broken up the surface of his mind; and Kit Scrase, dying, had left a seed in the broken soil as a legacy for his friend.

It was winter now, and very quiet up at Nieuport; but the attack was coming in March. By Christmas everyone knew that the Germans would launch in the early spring their greatest offensive. In front of the Allies, and especially in front of the British, they were banking up such a storm as had never before been let loose in the history of war. Their troop trains were chunking across Central Europe from Russia to France, bringing all the divisions released by the collapse of Russia and Rumania; innumerable guns were being parked at the railway junctions ready for transit at the right hour to the right place—some of them captured Russian guns and some of them Austrian guns from the Carpathians or from Italy; and General von Hutier had appeared in the West. British aeroplanes, flying over the German lines at night and dropping flares to illuminate the roads, reported labour gangs at work everywhere, and a streaming motor traffic, and dense columns of men on the march. Prisoners snatched in the persistent raids of the Allies proved by the variety of their regiments how great was the number of divisions massing between Croisilles and La Fere.

The storm would break with sixty divisions hurled on a front held by some twenty, and with three thousand guns facing twelve hundred—so British Intelligence said, and British Intelligence was wonderfully efficient just now, knowing in very fact almost as much about the coming offensive as Ludendorff himself. The Somme area would be Ludendorff's

choice of a battle-ground, they said, and March his hour. They did not say these things aloud, but rumour after rumour brought the whisper of them to the 15th at Nieuport. And only a fool—such as was not to be found in the Royal West Essex—could have failed to detect in the newspapers arriving from England the suspense and the preparations among the knowledgeable persons there. What was the meaning of these Cabinet Ministers' speeches, if not a preparing of the people for a stern ordeal, and a stiffening of their courage? "Our line may be bent," one of them had said frankly, "but it must not break;" and he had reminded his audience that, if troop trains were coming across Europe from Russia, so were troopships coming across the Atlantic from America; and that if (as was true) the ships could not come as fast as the trains, at least they would still be coming long after the trains had ceased.

So the winter unfolded itself as a waiting for March. Sometimes the Essex were in the line, and sometimes back in billets at Wulpen or Oost Dunkerque. The trench line before Nieuport seemed a street of luxurious residences after the shell-holes and ditches of Passchendaele. It was a French-made system of trenches and dug-outs zigzagging to left and right of that Yser bridge, which, seven years before, Tony had crossed with Frank Doyly, talking of the coming war. It fascinated him to look over his parados at night and wait for an enemy searchlight to illuminate the piers of the bridge, and then to remember that years before on a holiday tramp he had come towards it bringing such a conversation, and never knowing that the belt of pasture and trees on either side of him would be his No-Man's Land: where the Verey lights would shoot up at night and outline these trees, all shivered and blasted and thrown, and the machine-guns would chatter and the mortars bark, and thousands of men—French, Germans and British—take their bullet or their bomb-splinter and shut their eyes on this, their last picture of the world they had known. In the daylight he could see, rising up from the flat country behind the Germans, the ruins of Westende and Middelkerke, through which he and his friend had passed on that lively day.

When they were back in reserve they spent the nights among the farm-lands, building concrete pill-boxes against the threat of March; and in the last darkness before daylight they would foot-slog wearily back, to be met halfway by Padre Quickshaw

and the travelling Soup Kitchen which he had contrived out of an old motor van and called "H.M.S.-K. *Mulligatawny*." *Mulligatawny* had been three times riddled with shell splinters and bore three golden wound-stripes on her flank.

Tony preferred the nights when he worked to the nights when he slept. Oddly enough, his sleep in daylight was always deep and refreshing. It was only when he took to his wire-netting bed at eleven or twelve at night that he lay down with a dread of being started awake, in the small-hour darkness, by his dream of the Booted Feet.

Why this dream was certain to jump him awake, with a forehead chilling under a creeping sweat and a heart either pulsing at a sickly pace or experimenting with a total stoppage, it passed his wit to understand; for it was not a very terrible dream. He could not remember when it had begun to visit him. But its origin was easily explained. He had seen so many hundreds of men sewn up in their blankets with their boots uncovered, or laid against a trench wall with ground-sheets covering their faces and bodies but not their feet, that the sight of upturned boots with hobnailed soles had got on his nerves. So much so that those upturned soles would come unsought before his mind's eye, as he read his novel or gossiped with his subalterns or wrote a lively letter home. A reasonless dislike was growing in him of any pair of booted feet whose toes turned upwards, even though they belonged to a living man asleep. Empty boots, too, if they had been thrown down upon their backs and lay at a dead man's angles, could give him the same nasty turn. And at night his dream came—always in the same form: he was cutting himself a dug-out in the side of a ravine on Gallipoli, and as his pick pierced the ground, the earth fell away in great cakes; he was working very fast and he had nearly shaped for himself a little square subterranean room, far below the roots of the scrub, when one heave of his pick brought down a large block of earth and disclosed a pair of booted feet, with the soles upturned and the pattern of the hobnails showing. At that he awoke with a start.

One night this dream passed from his opened eyes and left a heart-failure so unwarrantable that he jumped out of bed, determined to walk up and down with the nameless shuddering and probe it to its source. The booted feet seemed to have nothing much to do with it. What *was* his trouble?

"I fear *what?* I suppose I fear that, when the time comes, I shall go the same way as Kit. But why? Because I know that I am in danger of believing no longer in nations and in patriotism; nor in their war, but in all the things which are its very opposite: how then can I go on with it when the time comes to shoot again?

"I *must* find a sufficient cause for going on. That is all I want, a sufficient cause for going on, lest my will break in pieces and I become unable to drive myself against myself.

"A sufficient cause? Well, we're *in* the war; there's no dodging it; if one by one we abandon it, we shall let the Germans win, and do I want that? No. No, because I still believe that, though the hands of neither side may be perfectly clean, the British leaders led their people into the war with nobler motives than their enemies did; and that, though the terrible deeds into which it is driving us may be a travesty of the simple kindliness of the German people, they are a yet greater travesty of the kindliness of our own; and that, on the whole, it is better for the world that the German idea should collapse before the British than the British before the German.

"But what right have I to believe that; why dare I believe that? I *do* believe it, but why? I think the answer resides in the men and in the junior officers and in all the lower ranks of the army—who *are* the British people, after all.

"Just look at these men of mine. They come from London, Lancashire, Sussex, Glasgow, and they've all got the same mark on them, really. They are all the same humorous grousers whose humour is just so much stronger than their grousing—just so much, but just enough; the same joking, tolerant grumblers, with their tolerance always just the necessary bit larger than their grumbling. They just carry on, jesting and cursing and jesting again—and jesting most of all when things are darkest. And during all the years I've known them I'll swear they've done ten deeds of good will for every deed of ill will. And they're all like that: just doing the job in front of them, and venting their anger over little things, so that they've no real malice against anyone; always much keener on giving their fags to their foes when they've got them as prisoners than on bayoneting them in their trenches; seldom excited to vengeance or hate, for the simple reason that they're incapable of seeing red unless someone's been bullying something—preferably an animal. Yes, when all is said and done,

it *is* fair to say that while Germany stands to-day for a military spirit, which is the bankruptcy of humour and good nature, England stands for an unmilitary spirit, which is their triumph.

"And just because of that, she will win, March or no March. She will not collapse, because at the back of her grumbling mind she is unashamed. The enemy will collapse; and just because the foundations of his thoughts are less secure. I've always said it: these men of hers are not defeatable in the long run, because, alike in defeat and in victory, they remain the same humorous, grousing stickers, the same lying believers. When we were marching up to victory at Romani or El Arish they talked their sedition, and made their sardonic jokes, and sang their melancholy songs; and they'll do precisely the same thing next month, when we go marching the wrong way in something like a rout. They'll be a little depressed by a retreat, of course, but only just about as much as they are inflamed by an advance, which isn't much; and not for a moment, despite all their defeatist talk, will they believe that they are to be beaten in the end.

"And I'm with them, surely, surely. I can shoot for them, can't I? Yes, to me it seems that all the subtlest thinking in the world cannot escape old Tappiter's simple-hearted conclusion that, since we believed in the beginning that the war was worth while—and we *did* believe it—then we must see it through to its end."

Almost happy again, he got back into bed, and was soon asleep.

In February came the order to march south, to the threatened area of the Somme. They were to go into the Fifth Army; and the Fifth Army, as all knew, was the one the enemy was minded to annihilate. They went to places that Tony knew well—Courcelles, Gommecourt and Achiet-le-Petit; and then to Ruyaulcourt, Bertincourt and Ytres; and it amused him, who had supposed himself no longer careful of men's praise, to find that he could still draw a puerile satisfaction from airing the knowledge of a veteran before his subalterns. In these parts they dug and built and dug and built, by night and by day. Trenches yesterday; a redoubt to-day; and trenches to-morrow and to-morrow. They were digging, so they

understood, the lines on to which the brigades in front would retreat after meeting the first onslaught. Men spoke of three lines, the Forward Line, the Corps Line, and the Army Line; but which was which, and why these works of theirs should be any of them, they had not the faintest idea. The nonchalant acceptance of an inevitable retreat shown by all the men down here, from colonels to privates, was a perpetual delight to Tony. They were justifying his faith. After four years of dull stalemate or balked offensives; after four winters in rain and snow and frost; after being promised that each new "push" was to be the "Great Push" and the beginning of victory, here they stood, facing the biggest set-back of the war, and according it nothing but resigned shoulder-shrugs, comic grimaces and bitter chaff. He did not meet one who really supposed that it was the end of the war for them, though he met plenty who *said* it was—aye, and even said they hoped it was. But behind this acid talk he perceived the unspoken certainty that if they didn't defeat the Germans this year, they'd do it before another ten years had passed. As they had phrased it for a long time now—and the words were as near as they could bring themselves to expressing so vulgar a certainty: "The first seven years are bound to be the worst."

"Champion little trenches, these that we're making for Fritz. They're for 'im t'occupy, tha knows," said the North of England, at labour in Picardy. "Eh, boot we'll mak 'em comfortable for 'im, and all."

"Not 'arf!" answered the South. "Myke 'em restful, like. 'E'll be that tired, poor b——, the way we'll make 'im run after us. And I tell you this, mate: he'll have to leg it like a good 'un, if he's going to catch *me*. I shall be for Ay-miens."

"Och, but these wee trenches'll nae be big enough to hold all the Boches that's coming," said Scotland. "They're no for that, you block; they're just to bury a few thousand of you in, while the others hop it to Ay-miens. Did you think Jerry was going to stop here? Ach, to hell! will he? He'll tak this wee patch in the first five minutes."

"Well, I 'ope it keeps fine for 'im," was the final comment of the South.

And the officers: when the First of March broke over Picardy, they said, "Happy new month, O'Grogan. Oh, to be in England, now that March is here!"

March the 21st. The day was suspected, and the hour: dawn on the 21st. And as March grew into her teens, bless her, the junior officers of the 15th debated long and often whether they would be in the thinly-held forward line at three o'clock ac emma on March 21st; or in support; or in reserve. And all wanted to wager that they'd be somewhere behind, because, said they, if they staked a quid or two on being in front and won the bet, they wouldn't be alive, unfortunately, to pocket the takings. Those who at length accepted this insecure bet insisted on very heavy odds.

The darkening afternoon of the 20th found them still behind: and they met one another with: "Looks good, my boy! No orders to move yet. Looks good!" "Quite; what's wrong with getting down to it early to-night? We'll want to be in good condition to run like hell to-morrow." "Quite; and we've got to stand-to from about three o'clock onwards, blast it!" They wrote letters; they made wills (secretly) if they had not done so before; maybe they prayed, but in their beds and silently, because all would rather be condemned by God to their eternal punishment than be seen by another Englishman on their knees. Tony's officers, Arnold, Copeman and McRae, being new men and without experience of a grand-scale offensive, were strained more with excitement than with fear; though they pretended like the whole British Army to "colossal wind-up"; and as for young Carder, who had joined but three days before, he was alight with happiness. Carder was a nineteen-year-old boy, fresh from a few months at Sandhurst, and his fair oval head was equipped with exactly the same mental furniture as the late Childe Harold's, but his body was very different from that young giant's, being slight and wiry. To-night he was as restless and impatient as a child before the curtain runs up on a pantomime; and he spent the hours before bed aiming his uncocked revolver at imaginary Germans and saying, "*Click!* That's made his nose bleed, Copeman. *Click!* That's given him a nasty headache, Arnold. *Click!* Got him right in the tummy! That's got mixed up with his sauer-kraut and sausage, sir. *Click!* That's gone splash in his lager."

"Someone put that child to bed," said Tony, at last. He had been marvelling at Carder's youthfulness, with its priceless gift of insensitiveness to the reality of war. It was a youthfulness which he had lost.

"Ain't gwine to bed to-night," Carder retorted, and took aim, and slew another German just by the window.

"Yes, you are," said the O.C. "Be a good little boy: there's a party to-morrow, and we can't have you feeling half-asleep all the time. You won't enjoy it."

"Oh, won't I, sir?"

"No, not if you get worked up like this; you'll turn feverish or be sick or something; and have to go to bed. And that'd be a pity, because there are going to be some nice games."

"*Yem!*" Arnold nodded. "General Post."

"Hide and Seek," grunted Copeman.

"Exactly!" Tony agreed. "So go to bed, infant."

"Dow wanna," pouted the infant. "*Click!* That's made a nasty mess of his spectacles——"

"Oh hell! no more of that!" Tony protested. "Come, it's ten o'clock; you know you can't be used to sitting up as late as this. Get a few hours' sleep, or you'll have no wind to-morrow."

"*I've* got wind all right," said Arnold.

"I can spare him some too, if he's short," muttered Copeman.

"Flatulent fellows!" Carder reproached them. "It's all this marmalade that does it."

"'Tisn't!" corrected Arnold. "It's these bloody crumps."

"But I don't quite get you, gentlemen." Carder looked at them innocently. "What for should I want wind!"

"For the races, my son," Tony explained. "These Boches can run. And we've only got a few yards' start."

"They *shall* run," announced Carder. "*Click!* There's one hareing for Berlin. *Click!* That's got him in the buttocks——"

"Oh, do dry up," pleaded Tony, suddenly irritable. And he got up and walked to the door of the mess.

Carder looked at Arnold with what was meant to be humorous alarm, and from Arnold to Copeman, and from Copeman back to Arnold, as if he would say, "Did you see that? He went all nasty, didn't he? Funny old Skipper!" and then, whistling the air of a song of his schooldays: "Father's got 'em, Father's got 'em, Father's got 'em coming on again," he sauntered away to bed. Tony meanwhile was looking out at the night. It was uncannily quiet, and very cold.

At midnight he had made no attempt to go to bed, though

Arnold and McRae had pulled off boots and jackets and dossed down for an hour or two, and Copeman was out with the men. He looked at his wrist-watch. One minute to twelve. . . . One minute past. Time had crossed over from March 20th to March 21st. It was rather like seeing the new year in.

Then sitting on a box with elbows on knees and fingers interlocked and head bent forward, while time ticked on. . . . The telephone buzzed. "Yes, who is it?"

It was the Adjutant, just making sure that all the lines were in order. "O.K.? Thanks. . . . How are you, old man? . . . All serene. . . . Good; chin chin."

"Wait a minute—I say, is it certain he's coming?"

"Who?"

"*Him.*"

"*Sh!* yes. Absolutely. We learnt it definitely to-night. He'll be here bright and early."

"Right. Well, so long. Cheerio. All the best."

Angry guns to the south. Hallo, hallo, what were they? It couldn't be the bombardment yet; it was only half-past two. No, it must be some raid or other; some wretched doomed battalion snatching eleventh-hour information.

Three o'clock, and the silence was intense.

Four o'clock: and now indeed his heart began to thump. Any moment now. . . .

CHAPTER XII

MARCH

AT what moment it began he never remembered. It was down upon them with such power and weight, and such uproar, that coherence was bullied out of thought. Nor was he able to formulate all that happened in the next hours, under that deafening bombardment and behind the blanketing mist. Memory cannot give form and pattern to a mêlée whose essence is chaos. Besides, most of it happened beyond the sweat-dimmed windows of his gas-mask, for the ground-vapour outside was one devil's cocktail dashed through with mustard gas, tear gas, invisible gas and phosgene. Copeman was killed at some point in the day. Brigade Headquarters was early lost, for all communications had "gone west," and heaven knew when Brigade, in the literal sense, went west too. When the telephone communications of a modern army are destroyed it is almost dead: all its sensory nerves are anæsthetized, and it is without hearing, sight and touch. Runners had been sent out; but few ever returned. Rumours poured up: the whole of their right had been driven in; the other battalions of the brigade, which had been in the forward line and in reserve, had taken the full knock and disintegrated; themselves, though they were only in support and on the extreme left of the caved-in line, were in danger of being cut off because the enemy were already west of them. Brigade had gone; Division was going; Corps was packing up. Well! If Corps, miles back in the lands of peace, didn't think they were safe—good God, what of us? There was a day and a night of this; and in the morning Colonel Tappiter himself appeared, affecting a perfect calm. "All right. Pull out, O'Grogan."

They pulled out—"All present and correct, sir. . . . 'Shun! Slope *h'upp*! Form fours! Right! By the right, quick march!"—and now they were marching. Marching all day,

west by north. They seemed to be leaving the crepitation of the battle a long way behind the horizon, in the east and south. A few slow shells came swimming after them, and Joe Wylie, looking up towards their hesitating sigh, called out, "Them's the blokes with their carpet slippers on." At many a cross-roads they halted to let the battalions of unknown divisions go streaming by with all their transport. These, too, had pulled out. At dark they were beyond the old Bapaume–Albert road and seemed to have set their faces towards Arras. "Gaw! it's Calais we're going to," shouted Joe. "The C.O.'s takin' us 'ome. He's fed oop." They lay down on the grass by the side of the road, and became a long line of twinkling cigarettes, before they rolled their overcoats around them and tried to sleep. All night it seemed to those who were wakeful that the unknown battalions went pouring by with their voices and their rumbling wheels; and that, if one opened one's eyes, one saw always that stationary light, enhaloed in the mist, where Colonel Tappiter and the Adjutant stood by a hurricane lantern hung on the mess float, and discoursed with each other or Colonel Tappiter put up his spectacles and studied a map, or the Adjutant shouted further instructions to a running orderly.

Long before daylight they were paraded to march again —"All present and correct, sir. . . . By the right, quick march!"—and they were marching through the mist. Once when the mist opened for a little they knew by a reading of the stars that they were marching south. "Blimey!" cried Joe. "If we go on this way, we shall meet the bleedin' war again." After two hours, and in daylight, they struck a main road. And there such a day began for them as should have broken their faith for ever, and did, in fact, make even the best of them mutter, "Well, if this isn't the end, I don't know whatis! Reckon the old war's finished now." For, as they marched in good order, Colonel Tappiter cantering back and forth along their ranks with a vigilant and sultry eye dropping down on their faces, an army in rout flowed with them—only faster than they, as the mid-stream water flows faster than the water under the bank. The disciplined battalions had gone down during the night: these were remnants, stragglers: men hurrying alone, or in groups, or in some sketchy formation under an N.C.O.; men of all units—gunners in riding boots, infantry men in puttees, Jocks in kilts; some with all their equipment on their backs, some without rifle or pack,

which they had thrown away; solitary officers and officers with half a dozen men; a French interpreter in blue; Walking Wounded with jackets or sleeves slit open and arms or breasts bound up; lorries packed with cheering men who seemed to be playing at old-style firemen; lorries dragging eighteen-pounders behind them; G.S. wagons loaded with a merry crowd like old-fashioned breaks on holiday; gun-limbers without guns but with a cargo of men; ambulances which took the centre of the road and were granted this right by all, even though Authority had perished in a night and Rout was in command.

Tony saw one sergeant who was leading some six or seven men in single file like a street-picket, hail a lorry piled with S.A.A. boxes: "Hi! where are you going?"

"Me, chum?" answered the driver. "I'm going to git aht of this mob if I can and make for St. Omer. Ay-miens is *for* it. Boss told me to pull this lot out any old where."

"Well, you can bloody well take us," said the sergeant. "Last thing my officer said to me was: 'Look after yerselves, sergeant. Try and fetch up in some town and attach yerselves to whoever'll 'ave yer.'"

"Come on, then, blast yer," said the driver; and they clambered aboard.

And all the while the 15th Royal West Essex tramped on in good order: grumbling as the day wore on and their feet wore out; cursing the Colonel; swearing that if the old s—— tried to sacrifice them all when it was no bloody good, they'd see him in hell first; silencing as he trotted past them, dropping his vigilant eye. Now and then Joe Wylie enlivened the day with an appropriate song: "I wonder why I sometimes sigh the way I do." Tony, though he had no horse, played the same game with his company as the Colonel played with the battalion; every fifteen minutes or so he left his place in front of them and walked down their ranks and up again, rating some, encouraging others. He felt particularly sorry for little Carder, so new to war, who was trudging along at the rear of the company; but always the boy looked up at him with a smile. Once Tony walked as far as the back of the battalion, and he saw Quickshaw trudging along with the Quartermaster —Quickshaw, in a belted trench-coat, his protruding eyes staring abstractedly ahead, his tin hat pushed back, his mouth moist at the corners, and a rifle slung on his shoulder.

"Hullo, old padre," he greeted him. "Where have you sprung from?"

"Ask me another," said Quickshaw. "I was up in the line with the 13th when we all vamoosed, and as I couldn't find Brigade anywhere—if you ask me, they'd flitted half an hour before—I decided to look after meself. I don't know where I got to last night, but this morning I scrounged a lift on a mess float, and as we were streaking down the road (we came pretty fast, I can tell you! *I* saw to that), I recognized old Tappiter at once and hopped off to join you. Your crowd's about the only unit in the Brigade that's intact, I fancy. They always were the best push of the lot."

"Oh, I don't know; we didn't cop it like the others," said Tony, deprecating this praise. "We were behind."

"Yes, that's true," Quickshaw allowed, rather ashamed, perhaps, of what must have sounded like flattery, and glad to remember that there was no justification for it. "And the others got it in the neck. They were quite right to do a guy—those who were alive. *I* did, *you* bet yer boots."

"Well, we're glad to see you, padre."

"Yes, you'll have to feed me now," said Quickshaw, unsmiling. "I've put myself on your ration strength."

"Delighted, delighted. But what are you carrying a rifle for? Have you turned combatant in these strenuous times?"

"Nope! I'm carrying it for one of these lads in front, who's just about done to the wide. Old Tappiter strafed me to blazes for doing it last time he was good enough to pay us a visit, and ordered me to return it to the fellow. Which I did, but I took it back again as soon as he was out of sight; and now I'm keeping my eyes skinned for his next appearance—when the lad can carry it again for a minute or two."

"H'm," mumbled Tony doubtfully.

"Oh, it's all right. Don't you worry," Quickshaw explained. "Tappiter made his point, which was all he wanted. He can't officially give his consent to one man carrying less than another, but he's probably quite satisfied that it should be done, so long as we don't let him see it. *I* know him. . . . Not, mind you, that I shan't pick up a rifle—there are plenty lying about—and use it if any blasted Hun tries to shoot *me*."

"Oh no, padre," Tony rebuked. "Oh no. Hague Convention—Geneva Convention—or whatever it is!"

"Geneva be blowed! He'll have busted it first if he attacks me."

"Oh no, padre," repeated Tony. "You shouldn't have said that. I'm afraid I shall have to report you."

"Report me as much as you like. *I* don't care. I'm quite ready to be cashiered. I'm thinking about cashiering myself before I'm much older. I'm just about through with it all. If at the end of four years we can't do any better than this, well, I'm not going to waste any more of my life with such a rag-time army. It makes me want to puke. My Church Lads' Brigade at home are better than this, and *they're* poisonous enough, God knows."

Tony cocked his head towards the traffic rioting by on the left. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Damn awful," answered Quickshaw laconically.

"But we're still winning, I suppose?"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," assured the padre. "But our advance isn't timed for a few years yet. It's due somewhere in 1930, and *I* shan't be here then, thank God."

"No. . . . Well, good-bye, padre. *Ora pro nobis.*"

For the first time Quickshaw grinned.

"Yes, and you need it," he hurled after Tony's retreating figure.

Another night they slept by the roadside, spreading their ground-sheets on the dewy grass; and in the misty dawn continued their march. By noon of this day they were out of the wasted Somme lands and among the inhabited villages. There were two streams in the river of traffic now, for the fleeing civilians were pouring along with the soldiers, a dark stream beside and amid the khaki: they poured along, each family with its cart or barrow creaking under mattresses and furniture, and towing belike a horse or cow or dog; on foot they came, on bicycle, on horseback, on cowback; old men in blue blouses and peaked caps; old and young women in black skirts, black shawls and *en cheveux;* and children in assorted rags who either clutched their mothers' hands and aprons, weeping aloud, or ran with laughter, like playful dogs, by the side of the great recession. At one cross-roads the river was banked and dammed by a transverse stream of traffic through which, after a halt seething with curses, it forced its way and flowed on. At another cross-roads it passed a Staff Officer who stood by a notice board, "STRAGGLERS

THIS WAY," and diverted some of its waters out of the main flow. A few of the refugees made common cause with the soldiers and were friendly; others spat and hissed, "*Poltrons!* . . . *Sales bêtes!*" Tony, walking for the nonce with Quickshaw, never took a nastier wound than when a comely peasant girl, who was bumping behind her father on a farm horse, stared into his eyes and spat out, "*Anglais! Pf!* . . . *Poltrons!*" "*Non, non!*" he tried, feebly; and Quickshaw, whose eyes had shot fire, spat back, "*Poltrons* yourself, and ten times over! Yes, and with knobs on!" for Quickshaw's style, under provocation, always went to pieces and he could do nothing but explode like a schoolboy's "jumping cracker" and like a damp one, too. Neither protest had been of any use, for the girl was gone. And the wound in Tony cried after her, "Oh, why can't you understand? Oh, why can't you understand?"

At one time when the half-light of early evening was deepening into night, their road tilted on to higher ground, and he looked away to the left where the bruit of battle still grumbled and shuddered along the sky; and everywhere he saw the glare of small conflagrations: it was the dumps burning. And here McRae and two of his men were killed, and a young corporal wounded. Before they knew what was happening, the battle was in the sky above their heads: a huge Gotha, ringed round with a guard of smaller aeroplanes, was sailing above the shrapnel and high explosive, and *crash! crash!* the bombs were dropping on the retreating army. One fell in the pasture by the side of C Company, and four men died: three Englishmen and an old Picardy greybeard. Women wailed. Quickshaw stopped and went to the fallen men; and Colonel Tappiter cantered up on his horse, after shouting at the battalion, "Get on, can't you! What the devil are you stopping for? March properly there, damn you! Cover off properly there!" The doctor pronounced the three men dead, but the corporal's wound unimportant—just a splinter in the shoulder. The Colonel, controlling his nervous horse, frowned down upon the misadventure; but before he could speak, Quickshaw had spoken:

"Look here, sir. I'll stand by this little lot. You and the doctor'd better get on. I'll see that these three are buried, and I'll get the corporal in somehow. You can walk, can't yer?" he inquired of the corporal, snappily, as if the man was in some way an offender.

"Yes, sir," said the corporal. "It's nothing."

"No. . . . Well, I'll get him in, sir. I'll either stop the first ambulance or walk him along. You leave it to me, sir. You hurry on and save Amiens; it looks as though it's *for* it all right. And *I'll* see that we're not taken by the Germans —you can wager your life on that, haw! haw!"

"Well, that's decent of you, padre," mumbled the Colonel, plainly anxious to get on.

"Oh, no, no," Quickshaw demurred uncomfortably. "Glad to have been some damned use to someone."

Those were the last words that Tony heard from Quickshaw during the years of war, and a minute later he saw the last of him. The road had dipped and curved, and he turned round and saw Quickshaw standing above his three dead men, with his hands in the pockets of his trench-coat, a cigarette drooping from his mouth, and his goggle-eyes gazing at the uneasy ribbon of light which pulsated in the eastern sky. A few more steps, and he had left this view of Quickshaw behind the bend; nor was he destined to find him again; though the padre survived and is alive at this hour. The battalion went on, silent now and footsore. Where they were going to, the Colonel and the Adjutant knew, but none else. A long way south it must be, because they were passing columns of French soldiers in their sky-blue coats, who were marching the opposite way, towards the shattered front of the British Fifth Army. These Frenchmen glowered at them and muttered. A lorry, piled with ration boxes, racketed by them, hurrying towards Amiens; and Colonel Tappiter, perceiving what it was, galloped after it and stopped it almost at pistol-point. Astride his horse, and his horse astride the road, he looked exactly like a highwayman in commission. Sharply he ordered his bravoes to unload enough rations for all the men; signed a receipt for them; gave it to the driver; and bade him get on. Over the cups of tea which the officers drank together he said little; if he knew anything about the fate of the rest of the brigade, he remained secretive about it; he said only, when he gave the order to march again, "We shall stand somewhere."

They stood at Grandpré about a week later. In the meantime they had been sent to many places and many tasks. One night

they were split into companies and sent to stiffen a miscellaneous throng—stragglers, labour companies, dismounted cavalry, American engineers, convalescents from the hospitals, and prisoners out of the cages—which had been hurriedly organized and thrown into a gaping fracture of the line. But no attack developed here, thank God: the battle roared to the south. They were drawn from this World's Fair (as they called it) and sent south again—always south—for the threat dropped south and south as the resistance, tightening in the north, forced it downwards like the bulge in a water-skin. And here for two days and nights they laboured unrestingly on an old French trench-system, lifting off the counterpane of grass and flowers which the years had woven over it, and finding, as the easy silt guided their picks, the whole outline of bays, traverses, saps and dug-outs, even as the explorers found the ground-plan of Troy under its tumulus of earth. But they never fought in this system: southward the line cracked and opened again; and they "pulled out"; and the day following was the second day of the battle all over again—they were marching west with a retreating army; marching all day, and in the evening light passing lorry-loads of French soldiers who were being rattled up to the points of danger. These were livelier fellows than those of a week before, who had looked moody and contemptuous; they knew, these fellows, that the German spate, though rolling onwards, was not rolling fast enough, and that the English, though they had broken under a weight which no army in the world could have supported, were re-forming in front of it, not seriously perturbed, and entirely unresponsive to the idea that it had beaten them; and that if, as seemed certain now, it would be held at last, then the war was well-nigh over, because the Germans could do no more, whereas the Allies were full of strength—were not the ships unloading America at the ports?—and so these hearty poilus waved their hands as they rattled by, and gesticulated and yelled "*On les aura!*" and "*Ils ne passeront pas!*" and when the English tommies only grinned uncomfortably at such disturbing heroics, roared after them, "Eets a long vay to Teeperah'ry," which they were firmly convinced was the marching song of the British—so little they knew them. At ten o'clock the 15th dragged themselves, dog-weary, into the township of Grandpré.

They found it deserted: the last of its civil population had

gone while the daylight blessed their going, and there was not a soul in the streets; not a dog. Only the cats sat on the thresholds before the locked doors or on the *trottoirs* beneath the shuttered windows, waiting for them to open again. For every door was tight closed and every shutter swung to: the peasants, shopkeepers and small *rentiers*, thrifty and tenacious to the last, had taken all the possessions they could carry and turned their keys on the rest, to keep out, *tu sais*, either German foes or English friends. "One can hope, *n'est ce pas?*" "*Mais oui, mais oui. Allons.*"

But not a hope for their houses when the 15th Royal West Essex entered, their knees breaking with fatigue and their feet dragging. Colonel Tappiter had ridden ahead with a billeting officer and found painted by the side of each door the number of troops the billet would hold—"Two Officers, Twelve Men"—"Five Officers, Fifty Other Ranks"—for a Town Major (now flown and reporting himself in Amiens) had been accommodating British battalions here during the last three years. The Colonel chose his headquarters, kicked open the door, and went in; and the billeting officer met the battalion by the Fleur-de-blé and parcelled it out among the houses of the main street, as the Colonel's tactical eye had instructed him, because it was just possible, Colonel Tappiter had said, "that we may have to put up a bit of a stand here." The doors were driven in, and the cats entered first with unmannerly haste, the foreign soldiers clattering after them.

Tony, Arnold and Carder found themselves in one of the larger houses, with the greater part of their men about them, in its rooms, cellars and outhouses; a few, however, had been herded into the dwellings beyond. It was a corner house standing where the Rue St. Roche met the main road. The three officers chose a room overlooking both roads; and there, after seeing to the welfare of the men and sharing a scratched-up meal which they were too tired to enjoy or finish, they flung themselves down for sleep. The room, though emptied of all its ornaments, had still its red plush horsehair sofas beloved of the provincial French; and these made quite comfortable beds for Tony and Arnold. Young Carder vowed that he preferred the floor and would leave the sofas to the old men; so he rolled the hearthrug round his haversack for a pillow, and, lying down, rested his cheek against it, saying, "This is fun."

Exhaustion kept sleep on the wrong side of their foreheads for some time, and they lay mute and inert, or they turned over and sighed and yawned, each supposing that the others had been more fortunate than he and had long ago "got off." Arnold was the first to find his way into sleep and to leave the others to their miseries: with a falling jaw, nasal breathing, and the attitude of a limp corpse which had been thrown face downward on the sofa and allowed to dangle as it fell, he slept; and his sleep insulted their wakefulness. Once Carder sat up, had a long look at him, and giggled; then lay down again, mumbling, "Damn! Thrice damn!" and tried to jerk himself into comfort as a child does. But Tony did not speak nor show that he had seen anything. A few minutes later there was the rattle and clangour of lorries on the cobbles outside, and the shouts of separated voices, and the ringing beat of a cantered horse. Carder, with a muttered "Oh hell!" scrambled up and tiptoed to the window.

"What is it?" asked Tony.

"More French going through."

"Which way?"

"Towards the Boche of course."

"Oh well. . . ." Tony sighed and shut his eyes again, to continue his pleading with sleep for its mercy.

"No," said Carder, abruptly leaving the window. "I can't look at it, O'Grogan. I don't like to see the Frenchies—on *our* lorries too—hurrying towards the Boche while we're hurrying away from them. They oughtn't to be thinking they can hold a line which we can't. It's bad for their souls."

"Oh, what does it matter?" sighed Tony.

"Matters a hell of a lot. This evening when they kept passing us on the road, I had to hang my head."

"Rot. They knew that we took the first shock, and that no one could possibly have stood it, and that we're being got out to reorganize."

"Do they? I hope so. Anyhow I hope they get it in the neck too."

"*I* don't."

"*I* do. It'll learn 'em to feel superior."

"Oh, go to sleep."

"Right-ho. But I say, O'Grogan, is it true that we're the only battalion that hasn't disintegrated?" He sat down on the floor and adjusted his pillow.

"I don't know," answered Tony listlessly. "I can't worry about the others."

"Funny! I didn't expect the war'd be like this at all, at all. . . . What annoys me, O'Grogan, is that if only I'd stayed at Boulogne t'other day I might have waited for the Front to come to *me*. I'd have saved a devilishly uncomfortable journey in one of your troop trains, a hell of a walk up to the Line, and now this hell of an undignified walk back."

"Well, I'm sorry, Carder; but *I* can't help it. The Boche is properly through this time."

"But bother and oh dear, O'Grogan: is that strictly according to programme? I mean, we hammer at the Boche for four years, and at the end *he* breaks through, not us. . . . Of course, it's none of my business, but when I was fifteen I saw what a mess you fellows were making of it out here, so directly I was nineteen I came out to give you a lift—and here I am scurrying back in a most ungentlemanlike retreat."

"We shall reform and stop 'em somewhere, and then you can take matters in hand and improve 'em a bit—so now go to sleep."

"You don't think we're beaten?"

"Beaten! Gosh, no! . . ."

"Good. I feel glad about that on the whole. . . . Hello! . . . Listen!"

He had heard, and at no great distance away, the nervous rapid-fire of engaging infantry; first the mechanical gibber of Lewis guns or *mitrailleuses;* then a crackling and spluttering as when new coke is shot on to roaring flames; then a *rallentando* till the noise split up into the intermittent snapping of machine-guns; lastly the isolated whipcracks of a rifle, and silence.

Tony sat up.

"Close!" he said.

"Small-arm fire too," Carder hinted grimly.

They listened for a resurgence of the fire, but there was only the level thrumming of the night.

"If that was as near as it sounded," said Tony at last, "it means that they've driven back the French as well."

"Well, thank God for that!" said Carder.

Tony sat thinking for a long minute: then flung himself back for sleep. "I'm not worrying about it any more," he complained. "We shall know when they tell us. And if they come, they come. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Carder. . . . "But I rather hope they do come. I want to see a bit of scrapping now that I've come all this way."

"Oh, go to sleep."

Oh, if one could only go to sleep: one might awake then with nerves refreshed and this nameless apprehension allayed for a while. Not again could he build up from the bottom, and brick by brick, that citadel of rational argument wherein he had fortified himself against the mouthing ghosts without; he was too tired. He must have built it around him a score of times during his silent marching of the last few days; and always from the bottom again, brick by brick. If he failed, he failed; he had tried hard, and he could do no more. Oh, to sleep, to sleep! Surely he was nearly asleep now. Let him arrest all thinking, and then suddenly he would find that he had dropped asleep. Now: think of nothing. . . . One night at Nieuport—how long ago was it?—it must be over two months—he had worried through all the argument till he arrived at the certainty that he could kill for England and bid his soldiers shoot. "Go, bid the soldiers shoot"—where did that come from? Shakespeare certainly: he could see a stage and a helmeted prince standing above fallen figures and pointing with an outstretched arm: "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." Was it Henry V at Agincourt? Or Mark Antony on the field of Philippi? Or was it somewhere in Antony and Cleopatra—

> "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold——"

how did it go on?—oh, confound it, how did it go on? Something about "O'er-picturing that Venus, where we see The fancy out-work nature . . . O rare for Antony!" Himself and Honor in a boat on the river, with the old grey wall of Kew Gardens on one side and the tall trees of Brentford Eyot on the other; and the long stretch of the river empty, as it always was in the youth of the year. That was the day after their first meeting, and he had taken her on the river and kissed her under an overhanging branch, and quoted, "O rare for Antony!" How lovely had been that first touch of Honor's lips! What bright years they were, and how they had stretched—just like the sunlit river itself that day—right up to the foot of the gathered storm! Would he ever see

Honor again? Oh, get off that!—it played the devil with one's heart. . . . By what train of thought had he arrived at this picture of Honor and himself on the river? From *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that had come out of "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." Ah, of course, they were the last words of *Hamlet*. And that night in Nieuport he had, with careful thought, achieved the conviction that it was all right and he could go on and ought to go on; so there was no need now to marshal the argument again: it had been done once and that was enough. To sleep then. . . . And, oh thank God, he must be asleep now, because he was digging in the slope of Trolley Ravine on Gallipoli, and thinking how good to be on the old Peninsula again, and no longer in that room in Grandpré, France, waiting for the Germans to come. That was a bit of a horror, wasn't it? The wind in Trolley Ravine, touching one's cheeks, is an unspeakable relief. Now to get on with this dug-out. I'll tunnel till I'm well under the roots of the scrub, and then Joe Wylie shall wangle some pit props from the Sappers' Dump, and we'll make a home to be proud of. Carder can share it with me if he likes, and we'll pin up our photographs. Honor would be amused to think she was smiling down from the walls of such a rabbit burrow; and Carder's got a girl to hang opposite her, I'll be bound—poor kid, I hope he comes through all right. When I've finished, I'll bring Honor in to see this dug-out; and here in this darkness we'll kiss just as we did that day on the river. Funny that the thought of her lips can agitate one's body with delight and empty one's throat; it's all rather wonderful. Think of that day when all this is over and we meet on the platform again: that'll be a more wonderful embrace than that first kiss on the river. We shall lapse back again into a lower love, and sometimes be impatient with one another, but what matter? These moments show us what is possible between us. I want her. God, how I want her! I'm done—that's the truth of the matter; I'm *done*, and I want her. . . . But that's over; I'm out of that room now and back on Gallipoli, digging in Trolley Ravine. They seem to be having an unpleasant little scrap up in the line; the machine-guns are quarrelling spitefully enough. Can the Turks be raiding us? Why doesn't Joe Wylie come and give me a lift? We must finish this dug-out before the dark falls. Somehow Joe Wylie and the men are my justification for going on, but how, God knows.

Doesn't matter, I'd decided that I wouldn't struggle through that heavy argument again: it always makes my head ache, and there's so much pain mixed up with it. I'd better take the pick to this. . . . And now the shovel. . . . Pick again. . . . Slow, quiet work, and not unpleasant. How can that roof of earth stay up, now that I've tunnelled my way so far; there must be many tons of it ready to fall. But if it falls, it'll fall in chunks, and I can clamber out. So on again. Where's the pick? . . . No, don't have *that* wall down, there's something behind it; something horrible. *Don't*, I say! Oh, what are you doing? I said leave it, leave it, you fool! There, down she comes! Look, those are a man's boots. Oh come away, there's someone buried here. I can't come away——

Tony was awake and a grey light in the room told him that he must have slept till nearly dawn. His heart was pumping in the mad panic always induced by this dream; and he was waiting for it to quiet, and brushing his shirt sleeve along his dripping forehead, when a question leapt in his head, and, seated there, drove the heart faster: *was* someone mounting the stairs hurriedly and coming towards the door of the room? He could not move, but stared like a terrified child at the door. This sound of approaching footsteps, as it was more startling, so it was more quickly apprehended than the crepitation of rifle fire which trembled perpetually in the distance and now and then shook the window-frames of the room. The footsteps were running along the passage; the door-handle turned.

"Is Captain O'Grogan here?"

"Yes, what do you want?"

"Runner from H.Q., sir. A message."

"Bring it over."

His hand trembling, he lit a candle and held the message close to its flicker.

"Christ!"

He was on his feet, hurriedly initialling the message-form, and calling to Arnold and Carder, "Here! wake up, you fellows. . . . Arnold . . . Carder . . . wake up. They're through again."

The two other officers sat up blinking.

"They're through," repeated Tony.

"Who? What?"

"On our right. The French are all going back that way."

"Well, thank God for that!" murmured Carder, sleepily.

"Don't be an ass. I've just had a message that we're to stay where we are and hold this place at all costs."

Now Carder jumped to his feet. "Oh good!"

"*Good?*" laughed Tony, who had not yet secured control of himself. "It'll probably be the end of you." And, coatless and hatless as he was, he rushed out to find the Company Sergeant-Major. Arnold and Carder laced up their breeches and whipped on their jackets and their boots, too excited to speak. Tony was quickly back.

"I've told the Sergeant to fall in the men and detail them to all the windows overlooking the road. The batmen and cooks are to take their places with the others. You, Carder——"

"Shan't have time to shave, shall we, boss?" asked Carder.

"God, no!"

"I've missed my shave five times in the last week," sighed the youth. "It really is the beginning of the end when the British Army gives up shaving."

"You haven't got anything to shave," said Tony, "and I don't suppose you ever will have now. Look here: one of you's got to report to the Colonel with the Lewis guns."

"Oh, let *me*," begged Carder.

"No, you stay here. Arnold, you go."

"Yes, sir."

Arnold was gone. Tony dressed himself with fingers that fumbled. There was a confused noise in the passage, and the men entered who would man the windows of the room. One of them was Joe Wylie.

"Gaw, is it a bit dangerous, sir?" asked Joe.

"Oh no, not a bit," snapped Tony sarcastically. "It amounts to selling your lives as dearly as possible, as the saying is; that's all."

"Oh, Gawd!"

Joe's expression—staring, frowning—revealed his effort to grasp this thought. One saw that the man's mind had peered into the face of death, and stepped back from it. It was better to be stunned than to see. "Lummy!" he added.

"Hurry up, Wylie. Get to your place," Tony ordered. "Open the windows, men; and knock out all the glass. We can't have splinters flying about. Two men to each window. Carder, come with me. You'll have to take command next door."

"Yes, sir."

They went out.

The soldiers having cleared the window-frames of all glass, rested their rifles on the sills, pointing them up the street, where daylight was brightening. Joe pretended to have difficulty with the bolt of his.

"Blazes!" he said, laughing; though something caught at his laugh and spoiled it, and his voice was unsteady. "'Ow do you work this thing? I ain't bin a pukka soldier for three years."

"You fire from the thin end, Joe," said one of the men.

"Do yer now? Crimes, I thought I was ah't of this sort of thing for good'an'all, but they seem determined to make poor old Joe fight." He arranged the rifle on the sill. "Nah then, Britain's Last Hope!"

A man from Lancashire spoke.

"Reckon we're *for* it all reet now, lads. T'message said we were to hold this shop at all costs. That means, 'No surrender,' tha knows. Puts the tin hat on us, any road."

"Oh shurrup, Bill!" Joe protested. "You'll be makin' me afryde soon. I ain't as strong-minded as you are." And since humming and talking were better than thinking, he looked into his store for an appropriate ditty and began: "Oh my, I don't want to die, I want to go home;" which led him by a natural transition to:

> "Take me back to dear old Blighty,
> Put me on the train for London Town,
> Take me over there, drop me anywhere,
> Liverpool, Leeds or Birmingham, well, I don't care!——"

and some of the men, infected by the tune, joined in with him, gently singing:

> "I should love to see my best girl,
> Cuddling up again we soon should be;
> Whoa! Highty-tiddley-ighty, hurry me home to Blighty:
> Blighty is the place for me."

Here they stopped, both because it was the end of the song and because this pretence of cheerfulness had been rather hollow; but Joe, whose mind fled from silence, repeated the last half of the song, introducing a variation in its close: "Highty-tiddley-ighty, Tickle me under my nighty," which

drew a loud laugh and made him feel much better; so that he pushed his head out of the window and, looking down the street, called out to a friend whose face and rifle were issuing from a window next door: "*'Ellow! 'Ellow!* There's old Moke Murdoch! Hallo, Moke! Are you still in these parts? . . . *'Ere!*" he ducked his head—"Turn that bleedin' rifle the other way. None of your jokin' nah! Joo think this is a time for jokin'?" And turning towards the men with him in the room, he explained, "It's fellers pointing their rifles at one another that makes this war so dangerous."

This as a laughter-getter was not a success, and the silence came back, disturbed only by a gentle whistling through Joe's teeth.

"Slow, ain't it?" he offered at length.

"Thet's right," agreed his neighbour, Jack Fowler. "I wish to God, if they was coming, they'd come quickly."

"Thet's right," nodded a third. "This waiting gets on your nerves."

"It does a bit," nodded Jack Fowler. "Where the devil are the b——s? That scrappin' sounds a goodish way off."

"Thet's right," agreed the other. "It sounds as if it might be behind us."

Joe couldn't stand this talk, so he touched his rifle with mock nervousness, drew his fingers away as a woman might, and then shaped his shoulder to the butt and squinted along the sights.

"I done this before," he said. "On Brighton Pier. I useter git a bottle every time. And ma missus useter say, 'Nah, Jow: now do be careful.'"

"Art tha sure it was tha missus, Jaw?" asked the voice of the Lancashire soldier.

"Yuss. You've a nasty mind. It was my missus all right. Many a time ma missus and I've 'ad our run dahn to Brighton, on Sundays, by Restall's Trips. I wasn't able to go to church them Sundays, so I went on Monday instead (I *don't* think). But gah! don't talk about missuses. It's upsettin', ain't it? Where are these bleeders? Why don't they come?"

He fell to chanting in a low monody, "There's a ship that's bound for Blighty," till someone called out humorously, "Oh shu*rrup*, Joe!" and a less humorous fellow endorsed the protest: "Gawd, yes!" This dejected utterance emptied the room of its last whiffs of cheerfulness; and no one spoke.

Men took their weight from one foot and put it on the other, or they absent-mindedly flicked some dust off the barrels of their rifles. One man, shifting his feet uneasily, trod on a shard of broken glass and cracked it and cursed. Birds were greeting the morning with songs, despite its crackle of small-arm fire; but no one heard them. Nor could anyone have told when it was that the full daylight came.

"Slow, ain't it?" said Joe. "Lor, did I ever tell you this one, boys: how four of the Manchesters lawst their lives. It was when I was in the trenches at Haverincourt Wood——"

"Come awf it, Joe," laughed a fellow humorist. "You was never in the trenches."

"Yes, I was then! I was standin' on the fire-step one night lookin' through me periscope, and I see a shaller trench opposite, with the men walkin' abaht in it plain. Not above their knees, it wasn't. They was diggin' it; so I gits me rifle just as I got it now, and *ping!* that was one of 'em; *ping!* that was another; *ping!* over went another—gaw! it was money for jam. Next mornin' there was a hell of a pow-wow to find out how the devil the Hun was managin' to snipe our Manchesters who were making the new trenches in front of our line. *Wurl*, I meanter say! 'Ow was I to know it was Manchesters. I never let on, of course; but lummy! I did feel a fool at their funeral."

This lifted a fine laugh, and a continuing one, during which Tony returned to the room.

"They're coming, men," he said.

Hands and shoulders went to the rifles.

Higher up the street a Lewis gun spat; then another.

"H'm," a voice murmured. "Comin' nah."

"Thet's right," said Jack Fowler. "Them's our Lewis guns spittin'. Someone's seen 'em."

The Lewis guns stammered furiously.

"That's them. Now we're *for* it!"

"Gawd!" exclaimed Joe; and in his tone there was a plaint as well as excitement.

Tony, standing behind with his hand on his revolver in its holster, looked at Joe. Oh, what had been the argument by which he was to stiffen himself for this moment? How had it run? Hell! if he were not to fail, he had only seconds in which to think it out—and his brain wasn't working. . . . O God, don't let me fail. . . . I *did* arrive at a conviction

that I must fight on as relentlessly as ever. How was it done——

Hereabouts Joe Wylie turned away from his rifle, though still holding it with his left hand, and was quietly sick in the corner by which he was standing. The others paid little attention to him: their eyes were fixed on a bend in the road beyond which the Lewis guns were firing, and their bodies were braced taut behind their rifles: one or two swung glances towards him and away again. Joe looked up and met his officer's eye.

"Gaw, I'm sorry, sir," he said. "Can't help it. Got a bit o' wind up, and what with the excitement, it jest turned me stomach round. I'm a fool, I am." He brushed his sleeve along his moustache. "I feel better nah. . . . Come on, Joe——" he turned back to his rifle—"you didn't expect to join the army and *live*, did yer?"

It was an old joke, often uttered by the men in such moments as these, as their laughing farewell to life; and, like a flash in the sky, it lit up for Tony the justice of his love for England. His fingers tightened on his revolver, and he waited for the battle.

It was on them immediately. It had raged round the bend in the road till apparently the Lewis guns were reduced, for they were speaking no more; and now he saw the grey-clad enemy running towards them and kneeling to fire—but a fusillade—deafening! glorious!—blazed from all the windows, sweeping the streets clean except for those twisted bodies that lay on the cobbles, either writhing or deadly still. That defiant salvo from the windows—A Company, B Company, D Company, all standing by!—lit a mad excitement in his throat and charged his breath with an unshouted cheer; and inspired by it, he fired again and again, shouting encouragement to the men in the room, and leaning far out of the window to direct and applaud the others. He heard Joe's excited voice, as he too fired again and again, even at an emptied road: "Come on, me lucky lads. Every copper wins a prize! Why, gaw! it's money for jam! Every time a cocoanut!"; bullets began to splinter the woodwork of their window casements and flatten themselves against the brickwork under the sills and sing into the room, cracking the ceiling above; some of these gashes he heard, some he saw, as for a second his eyes swung towards the impacts; and all the time he saw the men

ducking, and drawing back, and returning their shoulders to their rifles for a quick nervous shot; then he heard a voice, "Where are they getting us from? There! the s——s! they're firin' from them ground-floor windows;" and now the inhuman regularity of a machine-gun had joined the kindlier fire of the rifles, and its *tratta-tat*, *tratta-tat-tat-tat-tat* started terror in the heart; his imagination saw its dotted line of bullets sweeping round as it visited the faces of the houses like the beam of a searchlight—inhuman, unintelligent, without caprice or mercy; it was on them now; he saw Joe Wylie slap his left hand to his right shoulder and collapse backwards on to a chair, yelling with a laugh that was partly hysteria and partly humour, "Christ! they've 'it me. They've 'it poor old Joe Wylie—gawd blast 'em!"; and just as he saw this, his head took a blow like the blow of a steam-hammer with a white heat in its centre—and the war went out for Tony.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHANNEL

HE awoke in the ward of a hospital. A British hospital: there were pyjama'd officers sitting up in their beds and talking English; there was an R.A.M.C. orderly arranging the drugs and lint on a long table in the centre of the room; and at the far end, by a recumbent form on a bed, there was a doctor in his khaki whispering with a nurse in her grey and scarlet. For some seconds this did not strike him as strange; but as he felt the constriction of bandages round his head and, putting up his hand, stroked the thick upholstery there, he began to piece together the jig-saw of the past, and he saw again that room in Grandpré and the fighting in the street, and Joe Wylie clapping his hand to his shoulder, and then—the black-out. Surely he ought to be a prisoner in German hands—but he looked again: no, there was no doubt about this being the ward of a British hospital: by the matchboarding of its walls, and the rafters, struts and tie-beams of its roof, it should be one of those large army huts. He moved: and, so doing, learned, after some prospecting with his hand, that his chest was bound up too; which immediately made him aware of his own breathing—that it was short and disposed to whistle asthmatically. A chest wound? He was never hit in the chest. What the deuce——

Once again: the Germans had been firing from the ground-floor rooms opposite; they had brought a machine-gun into play; Joe Wylie had been hit, and a second after——

"So you've come alive, have you?" asked a voice on his right.

He turned and saw the pleasant eyes of a middle-aged man gazing at him from above the blankets of the next bed.

"Yes. Where *is* this?"

"Etaples."

"*Etaples!* Gum, how the deuce did I get here?"

"On a stretcher, I suppose."

"Yes, but——"

And he posed the problem to his neighbour, who, in course of the catechism, explained himself as a major of the Koylis. The Major could not solve the riddle completely, but he gave him a *résumé* of all that had happened on the battle-front during the last few days—how the French and Australians had brought up more and more divisions and on March 29th had fought the Germans to a standstill; and Tony, counting up the dates on his fingers, decided that the morning of the French-Australian attack was the morning of the fight in Grandpré. Perhaps it had threatened the flank of those trying to advance through the village and compelled them to fall back before they had subdued the houses which so spitefully resisted them. It was maddening not to know his own story, and what had become of Arnold and little Carder, of Colonel Tappiter and Joe Wylie.

"Doc——" this was the Koyli Major calling out to the doctor, who was walking slowly down the room and continuing his earnest colloquy with the nurse. "Doc. This lad's alive, and gassing."

The doctor came across to them: a young round-cheeked Scot, with a toothbrush moustache; one of those whose faces give them away at once: a very earnest young man, rather humourless, and much pleased with his position of authority, because (so one guessed) it was not many months since he was sitting on a hard form with his examination papers in front of him, now writing feverishly and now biting his pen in despair; and to-day here he was, ordering his nurses and his underlings about.

"Ah, good!" he said. "By Jove, you've had a narrow shave, Captain." Apparently he had not been in the army long enough to know that captains were not so addressed. "Losh! that bullet as near as next door got your brain."

"Perhaps it couldn't find one," suggested the Koyli Major facetiously.

"Ah-ha-ha," laughed the doctor. "Perhaps not, Major."

Tony touched the bandages on his chest.

"But what are these, doc.?"

"Oh, you got another there, Captain. It went—er—rather close to the lung, but it's doing nicely."

"Funny!" frowned Tony. "I never felt that one."

"Quite possible," said the doctor.

Tony was mystified still. "What date is it?"

"Seventh of April."

"Seventh! Then it's ten days since——"

"Yes. You've been in here three days, and Lord knows how long you were held up in the C.C.S.s. There's been some congestion, you see."

Tony, with all the small pride of a soldier who has seen for himself what other men tell by hearsay, rather resented being told that there was some congestion.

"I know. I saw just a little," he said. "But have I been unconscious all the while?"

The Koyli Major answered this:

"You've been half-conscious sometimes, but damned silly. Never heard such b——s as you talked."

"Ah-ha-ha," laughed the doctor. "But that was natural, you see."

"Go on!" exclaimed the Major, surprised. "Was it?"

"What time of the day is it?" Tony asked.

"Three o'clock," said the doctor.

"And the seventh of April. H'm. . . . Did they get Amiens?"

"Who? The Huns? Losh, no! And they won't now."

"Is the battle over then, Doc.?"

"As good as over. The line's been more or less stable for a week now; and we reckon that means the beginning of the end for the Huns. They can't do much more, so they can just take their punishment now, and I hope they get it hot and strong."

Tony moved irritably. "Forgive me, doc., but out here we gave up that hate-talk just about three years ago. However, go on. Why is it over?"

The doctor gave the reasons learnedly. "They've shot their bolt, you see. They pushed on much too far in front of their heavy guns, and they've failed to break through in spite of all, and the whole thing's cost them about a hundred thousand men, which they couldn't afford to lose. Oh, we're very cock-a-hoop down here. We reckon the war's just about won."

"You wouldn't if you'd been up there," Tony could not refrain from saying.

"Hear, hear," agreed the Koyli Major.

The doctor was hurt. "Oh, but we've had our nasty times

down here," he said. "We had one of our hospitals bombed a little while ago."

"Did you now?" asked the Major. "Damn! you've seen the war, then."

"Yes, most of us think that you fellows up there have a less nerve-racking time than we do, because, after all, you can hit back."

"Well, perhaps so," granted Tony, too weak to argue. "I wonder if I can get any information about my battalion. I'm rather anxious about a young subaltern called Carder——"

"Carder?" said the doctor. "He's here."

"*Here?*"

"Aye. In another ward. He came down by the same train as you."

"Is he bad?"

"No. A smashed arm. Going to England to-morrow."

"Oh, by Jove! can't I see him? Is he a Walking Case?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I'll go and find him. Only don't talk too long."

As the doctor went out of the door, the Koyli Major asked, "Can't you do something to stop him calling you 'Captain'? It sends up my temperature."

"Yes," Tony agreed; "and his 'Ah-ha-ha' is rather trying."

Then Carder came. Tony's first impression of him was of one wide grin, with an arm in splints beneath it.

"Well I'm ——!" said Carder, nodding a few dozen times as he contemplated Tony from the foot of the bed. "I repeat it: I'm ——!"

Tony besought news of all that had happened at Grandpré.

"Oh *that?*" said Carder. "That little scrap. How much did you see of it before they put you to sleep?"

"About six minutes."

"Oh well——" Carder put his mouth on one side and raised his free hand to pull at his chin—"we never quite understood what their b—— idea was. I think myself that they supposed they had open country in front of them with perhaps a few stragglers or a small rearguard which they could mop up in half no time, and they took the jar of their lives when they got old Tappiter's Lewis guns in their chests. Then, you see, that made 'em angry and they came on—you know—really peeved."

"What about Arnold?" interrupted Tony.

Carder sent his gaze through the window.

"Oh, he went west with the guns."

"I see. Well, what next?"

"Well, then, having silenced the guns, as the press correspondents say, they intended to clear the village at the bayonets' point, and they came doubling round the corner—and all they knew then was our rapid fire. It made a most unpleasant mess of them."

"Yes. I saw that."

"Well, being sensible lads, they withdrew under cover, and sniped us for a little, and then came on again, shouting and yelling. Darned plucky lads, they were. It seemed almost bullying to shoot 'em down, but what would you?—not to say *que voulez vous?*—we let 'em have it. My boys were wonderful; and *I* picked off about six, with a rifle borrowed from one of my boys who had been hit and was a-cussin' something awful, O.G. By the by, you remember I was in the house next to you: well, they got some machine-guns going—our Lewises, I dare say—and really they were rather irritating. Most of my boys who stopped one stopped it with their dials—which must be painful. I think they tried to rush the houses three times, but we were not having any, and they went back to scratch their heads over it. Now if I'd been in command at that juncture, I'd have liked *us* to do some cleaning up of the village, but old Tap held his hand. Meanwhile, you must know, there was a hell of a battle going on in the south: it was the French and the Aussies and some cavalry coves, as we heard afterwards, giving 'em something to think about; and I fancy our little German lads began to wonder if their enthusiasm hadn't carried 'em quite far enough—not to say too far—and whether their left wasn't being biffed in, and they hadn't better get back before there was too big a crowd at the gate. Anyhow, discretion overcame 'em, and when old Tap sent his scouts out, they'd slung their hook. I can't tell you any more, because then the Walking Wounded were ordered to report to the M.O. and as I was one of 'em——"

"You never said when you were hit."

"Oh, didn't I? It was somewhere in the second over. Nothing much. So I toddled across to your house to see how you were, and as you were dead, I put the C.S.M. in command, which pleased him no end, and then went down to the

Mo's Sick Parade. And gradually all the stretchers were collected here, including you, and the Ambulances came up, and we wondered whether you were worth your place in one of 'em—a dust-cart seemed more in your line, but we decided to do it: one never knows."

"Yes, exactly. Well, never mind that. What about Joe Wylie?"

"Wylie? Oh, he's in England by this time."

"Good. I'm glad."

"Yes. And I think he's glad too. Fact, I think he was delighted to have his shoulder smashed. He said, 'That'll learn all the blokes what laughed at me for being a scrimshanker! That'll learn 'em!' And he's going to do no more work for the rest of his natural, but just live like a gent on his disablement pension. *I'm* going to England soon."

"So I've heard. And good luck to you."

"Yes, and I've quite enjoyed my week-end visit to the front, but I doubt if they'll want me any more. I say, O.G., do you know that Boulogne's simply stiff with Americans, and there's heaps of 'em here and at Paris-Plage—such smart lads—so clean!—with high collars and spotless uniforms. And, O.G.! They shave—just as we do!"

"Excellent, Carder!"

"Yes, and I say, have you studied your priceless doctor? He thinks he's living in the forefront of the battle, bless his heart! I tell you, these lads down here don't know there's a war on."

Tony said nothing to deflate young Carder's simple pride at having spent ten days in the real forefront of the battle; he didn't suggest to him that his knowledge of the war fell as short of other men's as the excellent young doctor's fell short of his; he saw that these unspoken controversies between man and man, in which they compared their shares in the war, must persist till the generation of its survivors had passed away.

It was a long time before they sent Tony to his hospital ship for evacuation to England; and he was a Walking Case when he went up its gangway. Summer gilded the houses, masts and bridges of Boulogne and stippled the water of the harbour with its golden light. Slowly his white hospital

ship went out between the white jetties and passed the masts of the steamer sunk at the harbour's mouth. Outside Summer lay on the peaceful sea, like a gull with folded wings. The boat was moving quickly now, so he kicked off the rugs wrapped round him by a kindly nurse, and walked forward to the deck-rail that he might watch the recession of the cliffs of France. Behind that wall of cliff and those rolling downs, and along a stretch of country from Nieuport to La Fere, there were millions of his countrymen strewn, thick as autumnal leaves. And under them were last year's leaves, and the falls of '16, '15, and '14, deep in the mould. He knew that he would not return to them any more: not again see the revetted trenches, the grey pill-boxes, and the trestled wire; or the squatting howitzers under their canopies of rabbit-run netting and branches, the field-guns in their jazz-coloured paint, the huts in the same harlequin dress, and the columns of men marching up the poplared highways with songs and blasphemies and jests. Strange that it could be so sad to know that he would never see any of it any more! Why, he was almost homesick on this ship steaming fast to England, as one is homesick for an old landscape and an old way of life, when one comes from bidding them farewell. Farewell, old war! To think that the days are fast bearing down upon us when you will have no existence except as men call you up in visions, and they but fading visions, with outlines insecure! To think that the years are at hand when we shall peer like short-sighted men into memory, trying to see you better! Was it thus—or was it thus? One forgets.

Like a child playing a game of good luck and ill luck, he told himself that he must not take his eyes from the cliffs till their last faint pencilling had gone into the haze. So he watched till, like a name one struggles to remember, he could almost see them but not quite. They would not come for all his effort, and he abandoned them.

But Summer, sporting on the water, filled all the Channel with light; and to see the last of France was to see the beginning of England. What an inexpressible tenderness flooded him as the Kentish cliffs sketched themselves between the sea and the sky! England that was his admiration and his love! For him, poor Irish alien! she was only the country of his adoption, but perhaps for that reason no native Englishman could love her quite so consciously as he did. He knew,

of course, that he had lost for ever the old schoolboy patriotism which sought his country's aggrandisement without regard to the claims of other nations; but never had he foreseen that he would return to her with such a love as this. It was perhaps the securest love he had ever known, because it had been cleansed in fire and there was nothing in it anywhere in which he could not believe. And at this moment it was as passionate as love for a person: it delighted in its object; it rejoiced in itself. In the exultation of it, if he could have found words, he would have said, "I want no other country to serve. . . ." Why did he feel so secure and so exultant in his love? Because, with all her shortcomings—and he was blind to none of them—he believed her to be kindly above all nations, and (he dared to say it) if less gifted than some, yet more civilized than all. Civilized, not only because she was so orderly and honest, so quiet and leisurely and laughing; not only because she had the dignity always to pay the dues demanded of her; but chiefly because she alone among the nations, alone in history, as far as he could see, had learned how to smite without hate. This country which could produce in their millions her laughing Wylies and Websters and Stotts and Robertses—she was worth the enthusiasm of her sons, and their service. Oh, he might be painting her with a lover's brush, but he had the lines of her face aright. There were blemishes on it—had he not deeply misliked the tone of the newspapers in the hospital, and just because they seemed to give the lie to this portrait? —but under the blemishes he could see the gracious face—consider, was not the whole of her army laughing at the newspapers while it got on with its job of beating the enemy and reserved its right to admire him for his courage, his endurance and his skill; was not the question heard in all her ranks from Nieuport to La Fere, "Who but *he* could have fought the b—— world for four b—— years?" These soldiers of hers in their millions, not her journals, were the real truth of her —were *she;* and they had written for ever that her heart was humorous and kind.

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VOYAGE OF THE JESTERS

Constantinople
Salonika
Imbros
Plains of Troy
E. Helles
Lemnos
AEGEAN SEA
1915
1916
1915
1917
1916
1917
Alexandria
El Arish
PALESTINE
Pelusium
1916
Bir el Abd
Romani
Kantara
1917
SUEZ CANAL
1917
SINAI
R. NILE
E. R.